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OMPLETE NOVEL

by

AEL SABATINI

Stories by

HUGH WALPOLE
L. B. YATES
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STANLEY OLMSTED
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Everybody's

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If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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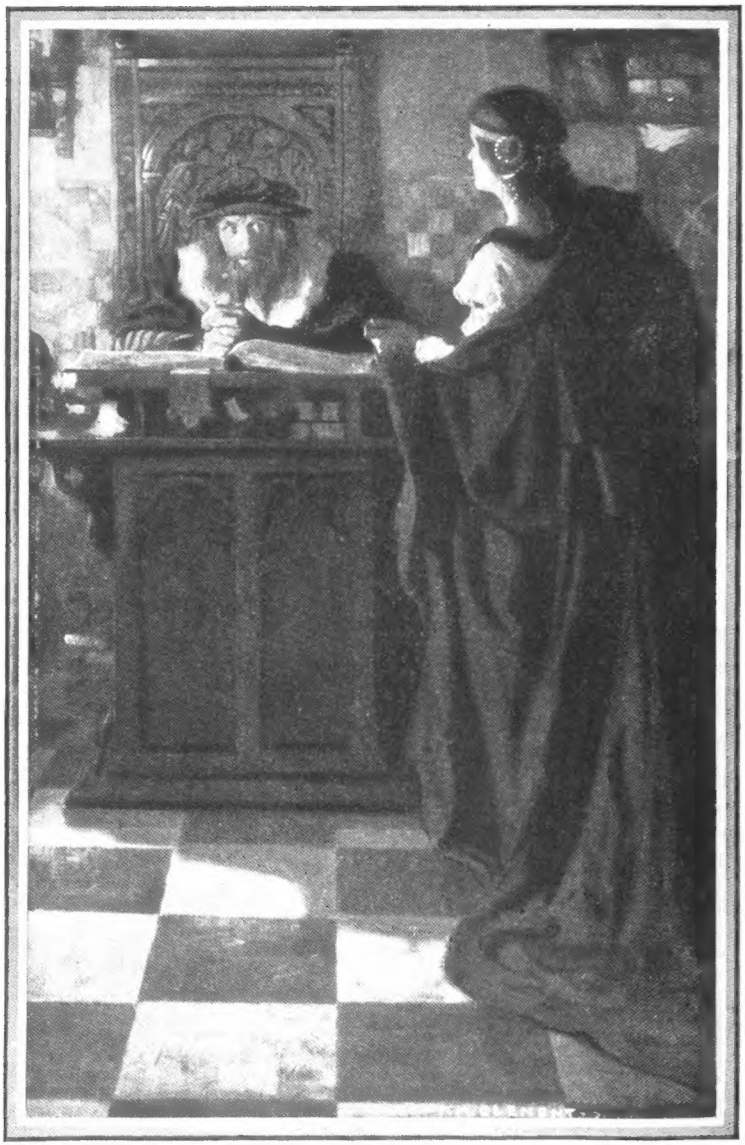

"Can you command love?" she asked. "Can you compel the cold to grow impassioned, the indifferent to be filled with longings? Can you—can you do this?"

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A Complete Novel by the Author of
"Scaramouche" and "Captain Blood"

The Urbinian

For Vital, Human Stories Built upon Characters and Episodes of a Bygone Day, Mr. Sabatini Has No Equal among Modern Writers. This Is the First of Three Novels by Him Which Everybody's Will Publish

By Rafael Sabatini

Illustrations by J. M. Clement

IN THAT shrewd chapter of his upon a prince's choice of ministers—of which I shall presently have more to say—Messer Niccolò Macchiavelli discovers three degrees in the intelligence of mankind. To the first belong those who understand things for themselves by virtue of their own natural endowments; to the second those who have at least the wit to discern what others understand, and to the third those who neither understand things for themselves nor yet through the demonstrations which others afford them. The first are rare and excellent, since they are the inventive and generative class; the second are of merit, since, if not actually productive, they are at least reproductive; the third, being neither one nor the other, but mere parasites who prey for their existence—and often profitably—upon the other two, are entirely worthless.

There is yet a fourth class which the learned and subtle Florentine appears to have overlooked—a class which combines in itself the attributes of those other three. In this class I would place the famous Corvinus Trismegistus, who was the very oddest compound of inventiveness and stupitidy, of duplicity and simplicity, of deceit and credulity, of guile and innocence, of ingenuity and ingenuousness.

To begin with, Messer Corvinus Trismegistus had mastered—as his very name implies—all the secrets of nature, of medicine and of magic, so that the fame of him had gone out over the face of Italy like a ripple over water.

He knew, for instance, that the oil of scorpions captured in sunshine during the period of Sol in Scorpio—a most essential condition, this—was an infallible cure for the plague. He knew that to correct an enlargement of the spleen the certain way was to take the spleen of a goat, apply it for four and twenty hours to the affected part, and thereafter expose it to the sun. In a measure as the goat's spleen should desiccate and wither, in such measure should the patient's spleen be reduced and restored to health. He knew that the ashes of a wolf's skin never failed as a remedy for baldness, and that to arrest bleeding at the nose nothing could rival an infusion from the bark of an olive tree, provided the bark were taken from a young tree in the case of a young patient and from an old tree in the case of an old patient. He knew that serpents stewed in wine and afterward eaten would make sound and whole a leper by conferring upon him the serpent's faculty of changing its skin.

Deeply, too, was he versed in poisons and enchantments, and he made no secret—

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so frank and open was his nature—of his power to conjure spirits and, at need, to restore the dead to life. He had discovered an elixir vitæ that preserved him still young and vigorous at the prodigious age of two thousand years, which he claimed to have attained, and another elixir, called "*acqua celeste*"—a very complex and subtle distillation, this—that would reduce an old man's age by fifty years and restore to him his lost youth.

ALL this and much more was known to Corvinus the Thrice-Mage, although certain folk of Sadducaic mind have sought to show that the sum of his knowledge concerned the extent to which he could abuse the credulity of his contemporaries and render them his dupes. Similarly, it was alleged—although his adherents set it down to the spite and envy that the great must forever be provoking in the mean—that his real name was just Pietro Corvo, a name he got from his mother, who kept a wine shop in Forli, and who could not herself with any degree of precision have named his father. And these deriders added that his having lived two thousand years was an idle vaunt, since there were still many alive who remembered to have seen him as an ill-kempt, dirty urchin wallowing in the kennels of his native town.

Be all that as it may, there is no denying that he had achieved a great and well-deserved renown and that he waxed rich in his mean dwelling in Urbino—that Italia Atene, the cradle of Italian art and learning. And to wax rich is, after all, considered by many to be the one outward sign of inward grace, the one indubitable proof of worth. To them, at least, it follows that Messer Corvinus was worthy.

This house of his stood in a narrow street behind the oratory of San Giovanni, a street of crazy buildings that leaned across to each other until, had they been carried a little higher, they must have met in a Gothic arch, to exclude the slender strip of sky which, as it was, remained visible.

It was a quarter of the town admirably suited to a man of the magician's studious habits. The greater streets of Urbino might tremble under the tramp of armed multitudes in those days when the Lord Cesare Borgia, Duke of Valentinois and Romagna, was master of the city, and the peaceful, scholarly Duke Guidobaldo a fugitive outcast. Down that narrow, ill-paved gap of sordid dwellings came no disturbers of the peace. So that Corvinus Trismegistus was left to pursue his studies unmolested, to crush his powders and distil his marvelous elixirs.

Thither to seek his help and his advice came folk from every quarter of Italy. Thither, in the first hour of a fair June night, about a fortnight after Cesare Borgia's occupation of Urbino, came, attended by two grooms, the Lady Bianca de' Fioravanti. This Lady Bianca was the daughter of that famous Fioravanti who was Lord of San Leo, the only fortress in Guidobaldo's territory which still held out in defiance of the irresistible Valentinois.

With much had heaven blessed Madonna Bianca. Wealth was hers, and youth, and a great name, culture, and a beauty that has been the subject of some songs. And yet, with all these gifts, there was still something that she lacked—something without which all else was vain, something that brought her by night a little fearfully to the grim house of Messer Corvinus as a suppliant. To attract the less attention, she came on foot and masked, and with no more attendance than just that of her two grooms. As they entered the narrow street she bade one of these extinguish the torch he carried. Thereafter, in the dark, they had come, almost groping, to the magician's door.

"Go knock, Taddeo," she bade one of her servants.

And on her words there happened the first of those miracles by which Madonna Bianca was to be convinced beyond all doubting of the supernatural quality of the powers that Messer Corvinus wielded.

Even as the servant took his first step toward the door, this opened suddenly, apparently of itself, and in the passage appeared a stately, white-robed Nubian bearing a lanthorn. This he now raised, so that its yellow shafts showered their light upon *madonna* and her followers. There was, of course, no miracle in that. The miracle lay in another apparition. In the porch itself, as if materialized suddenly out of the circumambient gloom, stood a tall, cloaked figure, black from head to foot, the face itself concealed under a black vizor.

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This figure bowed, and waved *madonna* onward into the house.

She drew back in fear, for, having come to a place of wonders, expecting wonders, she accounted it but natural that wonders she should find, and it never entered her mind to suppose that here was but another who sought Corvinus, one who had arrived ahead of her, and in response to whose earlier knock it was that the door had opened—just a courteous gentleman who stood now deferring to her sex and very obvious importance.

Devoutly she crossed herself, and observing that the act did not cause this black famulus—as she supposed him—to dissolve and vanish, she reflected that at least his origin could not be demoniac, took courage and went in, for all that her knees shook under her as she passed him.

The supposed famulus followed close upon her heels; the grooms came last, together and something cowed, though they were men she had chosen for the stoutness of their courage. The gloom, the uncanny gentleman in black, the grinning Nubian affected them unpleasantly.

The Nubian closed the door and barred it, the metal ringing shrilly as it fell. Then he faced about to ask them formally what and whom they sought. It was the lady who answered, unmasking as she spoke.

"I am Bianca de' Fioravanti, and I seek the very learned Messer Corvinus Trismegistus."

The Nubian bowed silently, bade her follow and moved down the long stone passage, his lanthorn swinging as he went, and flinging its yellow disk of light to and fro upon the grimy walls. Thus they came to a stout oaken door studded with great nails of polished steel, and by this into a bare anteroom. There were dried rushes on the floor; a wooden bench was set against the wall, and upon a massive four-legged table stood an oil-lamp, whose ruddy, quivering flame, ending in a pennon of black smoke, shed a little light and a deal of smell. Their guide waved a brown hand toward the bench.

"Your lackeys may await your Excellency here," said he.

She nodded, and briefly gave her order to the grooms. They obeyed her, though with visible reluctance. Then the Nubian opened a second door—at the chamber's farther end. He drew aside a heavy curtain with a startling clash of metal rings, and disclosed what seemed at first no more than a black gap.

"The dread Corvinus Trismegistus bids you enter!" he announced.

FOR all the stoutness of her spirit, the Lady Bianca now drew back. But as her eyes remained fixed upon the gap, she presently saw the gloom in part dispelled, and dimly she began to perceive some of the furnishings of that inner room. She took courage, bethought her of the great boon she sought at the magician's hands, and so crossed the dread threshold.

After her, in close attendance, ever silent, came the gentleman of the mask. Believing him to be of the household of the mage and his attendance a necessary condition, she made no demur to it; while the Nubian, on the other hand, supposing him, from his mask and the richness of his cloak, to be her companion, made no attempt to check his ingress.

Thus, together, these two passed into the dim twilight of the room. The curtains rasped together again behind them and the door clanged sepulchrally.

Madonna peered about her, her breath shortened, her heart beating unduly. A line of radiance along the ceiling, mysterious of source, very faintly revealed her surroundings to her—three or four chairs, capacious and fantastically carved, a table of plain wood against the wall immediately before her, crowded with strange vessels of glass and of metal that gleamed as they were smitten by rays of the faint light. No window showed. From ceiling to floor the chamber was hung with black draperies; it was cold and silent as the tomb.

The eeriness of the place increased her awe, trammeled her reason and loosed her imagination. She sat down to await the advent of the dread Corvinus. And then the second miracle took place. Chancing to look round in quest of that black famulus who had materialized to escort her, she discovered that he had vanished.

She caught her breath at this, and then, as if something had still been needed to scatter what remained of her wits, a great pillar of fire leaped suddenly into being in mid-chamber, momentarily to blind her and to wring from her a cry of fear. As

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suddenly it vanished, leaving a stench of sulphur in the air; and then a voice, deep, booming, but very calm, rang in her ears.

"Fear not, Bianca de' Fioravanti! I am here. What do you seek of me?"

The poor overwrought lady looked before her in the direction of the voice, and witnessed the third miracle.

Gradually before her eyes, where there had been impenetrable gloom—where, indeed, it had seemed to her that the chamber ended in a wall—she saw a man, an entire scene, gradually assume shape and being as she watched. Nor did it occur to her that it might be her eyesight's slow recovery from the blinding flash of light that conveyed to her this impression of gradual materialization. Soon it was complete—in focus, as it were—and quite distinct.

She beheld a small table, or pulpit, upon which stood a gigantic open tome, its leaves yellow with a great age, its colossal silver clasps gleaming in the light from the three beaks of a tall-stemmed bronze lamp of ancient Greek design in which some aromatic oil was being burned. At the lamp's foot a human skull grinned horribly. To the right of the table stood a tripod supporting a brazier in which a mass of charcoal was glowing ruddily. At the table itself, in a high-backed chair, sat a man in a scarlet gown, his head covered by a hat like an inverted saucepan. His face was lean and gaunt; the nose and cheek-bones were very prominent; his forehead was high and narrow, his red beard bifurcate, and his eyes, which were turned full upon his visitor, reflecting the cunningly set light, gleamed with an uncanny penetration.

Behind him, in the background, stood crucible and alembic, and above these an array of shelves laden with vials, coffers and retorts. But of all this she had the most fleeting and subconscious of impressions. All attention of which she was capable was focused upon the man himself. She was, too, as one in a dream, so bewildered had her senses grown by all that she had witnessed.

"Speak, *madonna*," the magician calmly urged her. "I am here to do your will."

IT WAS encouraging, and would have been still more encouraging had she but held some explanation of the extraordinary manner of his advent. Still overawed, she spoke at last, her voice unsteady.

"I need your help," said she. "I need it very sorely."

"It is yours, *madonna*, to the entire extent of my vast science."

"You—you have great learning?" she half questioned, half affirmed.

"The limitless ocean," he answered modestly, "is neither so wide nor so deep as my knowledge. What is your need?"

She was mastering herself now; and if she faltered still and hesitated, it was because the thing she craved was not such as a maid may boldly speak of. She approached her subject gradually..

"You possess the secret of great medicines," said she, "of elixirs that will do their work not only upon the body but at need upon the very spirit?"

"*Madonna*," he answered soberly, "I can arrest the decay of age or compel the departed spirit of the dead to return and restore the body's life. And since it is nature's law that the greater must include the less, let that reply suffice you."

"But can you—" She paused. Then, impelled by her need, her last fear forgotten now that she was well embarked upon the business, she rose and approached him. "Can you command love?" she asked, and gulped. "Can you compel the cold to grow impassioned, the indifferent to be filled with longings? Can you—can you do this?"

He pondered her at some length.

"Is this your need?" quoth he, and there was wonder in his voice. "Yours—or another's?"

"It is my need," she answered, low.

He sat back and further considered the pale beauty of her, the low brow, the black, lustrous tresses in their golden net, the splendid eyes, the alluring mouth, the noble height and shape.

"Magic I have to do your will at need," he said slowly; "but surely no such magic as is nature's own endowment of you. Can he resist the sorcery of those lips and eyes—this man for whose subjection you desire my aid?"

"Alas! He thinks not of such things. His mind is set on war and armaments. His only mistress is ambition."

"His name?" quoth the sage imperiously.

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"What is his name—his name and his condition?"

She lowered her glance. A faint flush tinged her cheeks. She hesitated, taken by a fluttering panic. Yet she dared not deny him the knowledge he demanded, lest, vexed by her refusal, he should withhold his aid.

"His name," she faltered at length, "is Lorenzo Castrocaro—a gentleman of Urbino, a *condottiero* who serves under the banner of the Duke of Valentinois."

"A *condottiero* blind to beauty, blind to such warm loveliness as yours, *madonna!*" cried Corvinus. "So anomalous a being, such a *lusus naturæ* will require great medicine."

"Opportunity has served me none too well," she explained, almost in self-defense. "Indeed, circumstance is all against us. My father is the castellan of San Leo, devoted to Duke Guidobaldo. Wherefore it is natural that we should see but little of one who serves under the banner of the foe. And so I fear that he may go his ways unless I have that which will bring him to me in despite of all."

Corvinus considered the matter silently a while, then sighed.

"I see great difficulties to be overcome," said that wily mage.

"But you can help me to overcome them?"

His gleaming eyes considered her.

"It will be costly," he said.

"What's that to me? Do you think I'll count the cost in such a matter?"

The wizard drew back, frowned and wrapped himself in a great dignity.

"Understand me," said he, with some asperity. "This is no shop where things are bought and sold. My knowledge and my magic are at the service of all humanity. These I do not sell. I bestow them freely and without fee upon all who need them. But if I give so much, so very much, it cannot be expected that I should give more. The drugs I have assembled from all corners of the earth are often of great price. That price it is yours to bear, since the medicine is for your service."

"You have such medicine, then?" she cried, her hands clasping in sudden increase of hopefulness.

He nodded his assent.

"Love philters are common things enough, and easy of preparation in the main. Any rustic hag who deals in witchcraft and preys on fools can brew one. But for your affair, where great obstacles must be surmounted, or ever the affinities can be made to respond, a drug of unusual power is needed. Such a drug I have—though little of it, for in all the world there is none more difficult to obtain. Its chief component is an extract from the brain of a rare bird—*avis rarissima*—of Africa."

With feverish fingers she plucked a heavy purse from her girdle and splashed it upon the table. It fell against the grinning skull, and thus, cheek by jowl with each other, lay life's two masters—Death and Gold.

"Fifty ducats!" she panted in her excitement. "Will that suffice?"

"Perhaps," said he, entirely disdainful. "Should it fall something short, I will myself add what may be lacking."

And with contemptuous fingers, eloquent of his scorn of mere profit, he pushed the purse aside—a thing of no account in this transaction.

SHE began to protest that more would be forthcoming. But he nobly overbore her protestations. He rose, revealing the broad black girdle that clasped his scarlet robe about his waist, all figured with the signs of the zodiac wrought in gold. He stepped to the shelves and took from one of them a bronze coffer of some size. With this he returned to the table, set it down, opened it and drew forth a tiny vial—a slender little tube of glass that was plugged and sealed. It contained no more than a thread of deep-amber fluid—a dozen drops at most. He held it up so that it gleamed golden in the light.

"This," he said, "is my *elixirium aureum*, my golden elixir, a rare and very subtle potion, sufficient for your need." Abruptly he proffered it to her.

With a little cry of gratitude and joy she held out avid hands to take the vial. But as her fingers were about to close upon it, he snatched it back and raised a hand impressively to restrain her.

"Attend to me," he bade her, his glittering eye regarding her intensely. "To this golden elixir you shall add two drops of your own blood, neither more nor less; then contrive that Messer Lorenzo drink

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it in his wine. But all must be done while the moon is waxing; and, in a measure, as the moon continues to grow, so will his passion mount and abide in him. And before that same moon shall have begun to wane again, this Lorenzo Castrocaro will come to you, though the whole world lie between you and him, and he will be your utter slave. The present is a propitious time. Go, and be you happy."

She took the vial, which he now relinquished, and broke into thanks.

But imperiously, by a wave of the hand and a forbidding look, he stemmed her gratitude. He smote a little gong that stood by.

There was the sound of an opening door. The curtains parted with a clash, and the white-robed Nubian appeared, salaaming on the threshold, waiting to reconduct her.

Madonna Bianca bowed to the great magician and departed, overawed by the majesty of his demeanor. She had passed out, and still the Nubian waited on the threshold—waited for the man he had admitted with her. But Corvinus, knowing naught of his slave's motive for lingering, bade him harshly begone; whereupon the curtains were drawn together again and the door was closed.

LEFT alone, the magician flung off the great mantle of overawing dignity, descended from the lofty indifference to gain, natural enough in one who is master of the ages, and became humanly interested in the purse which Madonna Bianca had left him. Drawing wide the mouth of it, he emptied the golden contents onto the vast page of his book of magic. He spread the glittering mass and fingered it affectionately, chuckling in his red beard. And then, quite suddenly, his chuckle was echoed by a laugh, short, abrupt, contemptuous and sinister.

With a startled gasp Corvinus looked up, his hands spreading to cover and protect the gold, his eyes dilating with a sudden fear—a fear that swelled at what he saw. Before him, in mid-chamber, surged a tall figure all in black—black cloak, black cap, and black face, out of which two gleaming eyes considered him.

Trembling in every fiber, a prey to a terror greater far than any it had ever been his lot to inspire in others, the wizard stared at the dread phantom, and assumed —not unnaturally, it must be confessed— that here was Satan come to claim his own at last.

There fell a pause. Corvinus attempted to speak, to challenge the apparition. But courage failed him; terror struck him dumb.

Presently the figure advanced, silent-footed, menacing, and the wizard's knees were loosened under him. He sank gibbering into his high-backed chair and waited for death, with hell to follow. At least, you see, he knew what he deserved.

The apparition halted at last before the table, within arm's length of Corvinus, and a voice came to break the awful spell, a voice infinitely mocking yet unquestionably, reassuringly human.

"Greetings, Thrice-Mage!" it said.

It took Corvinus some moments to realize that his visitor was mortal after all, and some further moments to recover some semblance of self-possession. An incipient chagrin mingling with the remains of his fears, he spoke at last.

"Who are you?" he cried, the voice, which he would fain have rendered bold, high-pitched and quavering.

The cloak opened, displaying a graceful, well-knit figure in sable velvet that was wrought with golden arabesques. From a girdle studded with great fiery rubies hung a long and heavy dagger, whose hilt and scabbard were of richly chiseled gold. On the backs of the black-velvet gloves diamonds hung and sparkled like drops of water to complete the somber splendor of the man's apparel. One of the hands was raised to pluck away the vizor and disclose the youthful, aquiline and very noble countenance of Cesare Borgia, Duke of Valentinois and Romagna.

Corvinus recognized him on the instant, and, recognizing him, was far from sure that things would have been worse had his visitor been the devil.

"My lord!" he cried, profoundly amazed, profoundly uneasy. And, thinking aloud in his consternation, he added the question, foolish in a master of all secrets: "How came you in?"

"I, too, know something of magic," said the tawny-headed young duke, and there was mockery in his voice and in his smile.

He did not think it necessary to explain that all the magic he had employed had

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been to enter as if in attendance upon Madonna Bianca de' Fioravanti, and then to slip silently behind the black arras with which, to serve his purposes of deception, Messer Corvinus hung his walls.

BUT the magician was not duped. Who makes the image does not worship it. The truth—the precise truth—of magic was known undoubtedly to Corvinus, and it therefore follows that he could not for a moment suppose that the means by which the duke had gained admittance had been other than perfectly natural ones. Anon the Nubian should be keenly questioned, and, if necessary, as keenly whipped. Meanwhile, the duke himself must claim attention, and Corvinus—knowing himself a rogue—was far from easy.

But if he were not easy, at least he was master of an inexhaustible store of impudence, and upon this he made now a heavy draft. To cover his momentary discomfiture, he smiled now as inscrutably as the duke. Quickly he thrust the gold back into the purse, never heeding a coin that fell and rolled away along the floor. He tossed the purse aside, and, retaining his seat what time his Highness remained standing, he combed his long, bifurcate beard.

"Betwixt your magic and mine, Magnificent, there is some difference," he said, with sly suggestion.

"I should not be here else," replied the duke, and abruptly he proceeded to the matter that had brought him. "It is said you have found an elixir that restores the dead to life."

"It is rightly said, my lord," replied the wizard, with assurance. He was becoming master of himself again.

"You have tested it?" quoth Cesare.

"In Cyprus, three years ago, I restored life to a man who had been dead two days. He is still living, and will testify."

"Your word suffices me," said the duke; and the irony was so sly that Corvinus was left wondering whether irony there had been. "At need, no doubt, you would make proof of it upon yourself?"

Corvinus turned cold from head to foot, yet answered boldly, of very necessity,

"At need I would."

Valentinois sighed as one who is content, and Corvinus took heart again.

"You have this elixir at hand?"

"Enough to restore life to one man—just that and no more. It is a rare and very precious liquor, and very costly, as you may perceive, Magnificent."

"Derived, no doubt, from the brain of some rare bird of Africa?" the duke mocked him.

By not so much as a flicker of the eyelid did Corvinus acknowledge the hit.

"Not so, Magnificent," he replied imperturbably. "It is derived from——"

"No matter," said the duke. "Let me have it."

The magician rose, turned to his shelves and sought there a while. Presently he came back with a vial containing a blood-red liquid.

"It is here," he said, and he held the slender vessel to the light, so that it glowed like a ruby. "Force apart the teeth of the dead man, and pour this draft down his throat. Within an hour he will revive, provided the body has first been warmed before a fire."

Valentinois took the vial in his gloved fingers.

"It cannot fail to act?" he questioned.

"It cannot fail, Magnificent."

"No matter how the man may have died?"

"No matter how, provided that no vital organ shall have been destroyed."

"It can conquer death by poison?"

"It will dissolve and dissipate the poison, no matter what its nature, as vinegar will melt a pearl."

"Excellent!" said the duke, and he smiled his cold, inscrutable smile. "And now another matter, Thrice-Mage." He thoughtfully fingered his tawny beard. "There is a rumour afoot in Italy, spread, no doubt, by yourself to further the thieving charlatan's trade you drive, that the Sultan Djem was poisoned by the Holy Father, and that the poison—a poison so subtle and miraculous that it lay inert in the Turk for a month before it slew him—was supplied to his Holiness by you."

The duke paused as if for a reply, and Corvinus shivered again in fear, so coldly sinister had been the tone.

"That is not true, Magnificent. I have had no dealings with the Holy Father, and I have supplied him with no poisons. I know not how Messer Djem may have died, nor have I ever said I did."

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"How, then, comes this story current—and your name in it?"

Corvinus hastened to explain. Explanations were a merchandise with which he was well stocked.

"It may be thus: Of such a poison I possess the secret, and some there have been who have sought it from me. Hence, no doubt, knowing that I have it and conceiving that it was used, the vulgar have drawn conclusions, as the vulgar will, unwarrantably."

Cesare smiled.

"'Tis very subtle, Trismegistus." And he nodded gravely. "And you say that you have such a poison? What, pray, may be its nature?"

"That, Magnificent, is secret."

"I care not. I desire to know, and I have asked you."

There was no heat in the rejoinder. It was quite cold—deadly cold. But it had more power to compel than any anger. Corvinus fenced no more.

"It consists chiefly of the juice of catapuce and the powdered yolk of an egg, but its preparation is not easy."

"You have it at hand?"

"Here, Magnificent," replied the mage.

And from the same bronze coffer whence he had taken the love-philter—the golden elixir—he drew now a tiny cedar box, opened it and placed it before the duke. It contained a fine yellow powder.

"One dram of that will kill thirty days after it has been administered, two drams in half the time."

Cesare sniffed it, and eyed the mage sardonically.

"I desire to make experiment," said he. "How much is here?"

"Two drams, Highness."

The duke held out the box to Corvinus.

"Swallow it," he bade him calmly.

The mage drew back in an alarm that almost argued faith in his own statement.

"My lord!" he cried, aghast.

"Swallow it," Cesare repeated, without raising his voice.

Corvinus blinked and gulped.

"Would you have me die, my lord?"

"Die? Do you, then, confess yourself mortal, Thrice-Mage—you, the great Corvinus Trismegistus, whose knowledge is wide and deep as the limitless ocean, you who are so little sensible to the ills and decay of the flesh that already you have lived two thousand years? Is the potency of this powder such that it can slay even the immortals?"

AND now, at last, Corvinus began to apprehend the real scope of Cesare's visit. It was true that he had set it about that the Sultan Djem had been poisoned and that he had boasted that he himself had supplied the Borgias with the fabulous secret drug that at such a distance of time had killed the Grand Turk's brother, and, as a consequence, he had made great profit by the sale of what he alleged was the same poison—a subtle *veneno a termine*, as he called it—so convenient for wives who were anxious for a change of husbands, so serviceable to husbands weary of their wives.

He understood at last that Cesare, informed of the defamatory lie that had procured the mage such profit, had sought him out to punish him. And it is a fact that Corvinus himself, despite his considerable knowledge, actually believed in the drug's fabulous power to slay at such a distance of time. He had found the recipe in an old manuscript volume, with many another kindred prescription, and he believed in it with all the blind credulity of the *Cinquecento* in such matters, with, in fact, all the credulity of those who came to seek his magician's aid.

The duke's sinister mockery, the extraordinary sense which he ever conveyed of his power to compel, of the futility of attempting to resist his commands filled Corvinus with an abject dread.

"Highness—alas! I fear it may be as you say!" he cried.

"But, even so, of what are you afraid? Come, man; you are trifling. Have you not said of this elixir that it will restore the dead to life? I pledge you my word that I shall see that it is administered to you when you are dead. Come, then; swallow me this powder, and see that you die of it precisely a fortnight hence, or, by my soul's salvation, I'll have you hanged for an imposter without giving you the benefit afterward of your own dose of resurrection."

"My lord—my lord!" groaned the unfortunate man.

"Now, understand me," said the duke; "if this powder acts as you say it will and

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kills you at the appointed time, your own elixir shall be given to you to bring you back again to life. But if it kills you sooner, you may remain dead; and if it kills you not at all—why, then, I'll hang you and publish the truth of the whole matter, that men may know the falsehood of the manner of Djem's death upon which you have been trading. Refuse me, and—" The duke's gesture was significant.

Corvinus looked into the young man's beautiful, relentless eyes, and saw that to hope to turn him from his purpose were worse than idle. As soon, then, risk the powder as accept the certainty of the rope, with perhaps a foretaste of hell upon the rack. Besides, some chemical skill he had, and a timely emetic might save him—that and flight. Which shows the precise extent of his faith in his elixir of life.

With trembling hands he took the powder.

"See that you spill none of it," Cesare admonished him, "or the strangler shall valet you, Thrice-Mage!"

"My lord, my lord!" quavered the wretched warlock, his eyes bulging. "Mercy! I——"

"The poison—or the strangler!"

In despair, and yet heartening himself by the thought of the emetic, Corvinus bore the edge of the box to his ashen lips and emptied into his mouth the faintly musty contents, Cesare watching him closely the while. When it was done, the appalled magician sank limply to his chair.

The duke laughed softly, replaced his vizor and, flinging his ample cloak about him, strode toward the curtains that masked the door.

"Sleep easily, Thrice-Mage," he said, with infinite mockery. "I shall not fail you."

Watching him depart, so confidently, so utterly fearless and unconcerned, Corvinus was assailed by rage and a fierce temptation to extinguish the light and try conclusions with Cesare in the dark, summoning the Nubian to his aid. It was with that thought in his mind that he smote the gong. But while the note of it still rang upon the air, he abandoned a notion so desperate. It would not save him if he were poisoned, while if he allowed Cesare to depart unmolested, he would be the sooner gone, and the sooner Cesare were gone the sooner would Corvinus be free to administer himself the emetic.

The curtains flashed back and the Nubian appeared. On the threshold Cesare paused and, over his shoulder, ever mocking, flung the warlock his valediction.

"Fare you well, Thrice-Mage!" he said, and, with a laugh, passed out.

Corvinus dashed wildly to his shelves in quest of that emetic, fiercely cursing the Duke of Valentinois and all the Borgia brood.

AS THE Nubian opened the door of the mage's house to give egress to the duke, he felt himself suddenly caught about the neck in the crook of a steely, strangling arm, while the shrill note of a whistle sounded almost in his very ear.

Instantly the hitherto silent and deserted street woke to life. From out of doorways darted swift-footed men in answer to the duke's summons. Into the hands of two of these he delivered the writhing Nubian; to the others he issued a brief command.

"In!" he said, waving a hand down the passage. "In, and take him!" And upon that he stepped out into the street and so departed.

Later that evening word was brought him at the palace of how Messer Corvinus had been taken in the very act of mixing a drug.

"The antidote, no doubt," said Cesare to the officer who bore him the information. "You would be just in time to save my experiment from being frustrated. A wicked, faithless, inconsiderate fellow, this Corvinus. Let him be kept in close confinement, guarded by men whom you can trust, until you hear from me again."

Thereafter Cesare summoned a council of his officers—Corella, the Venetian; Naldo, the Forlivese; Ramiro de Lorqua, his lieutenant-general of Romagna; Della Volpe, the one-eyed, and Lorenzo Castrocaro.

A tall, clean-limbed young man was this last, very proud in his bearing, very splendid in his apparel, with golden hair and handsome, dreamy eyes of a blue as dark as sapphires. Cesare held him in great regard, knowing him valiant, resourceful and ambitious. To-night he regarded him with a fresh interest, in view of what, at the magician's, he had overheard.

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The duke waved his officers to their seats about his council-board, and craved of Della Volpe, who was in charge of the siege-operations, news of the fortress of San Leo.

The veteran's swarthy face was gloomy. His single eye—he had lost the other in the duke's service—avoided his master's penetrating glance. He sighed wearily.

"We make no progress," he confessed, "nor can make any. San Leo is not a place to be carried by assault, as your Magnificence well knows. It stands there upon its mountain-top like a monument upon a plinth, approached by a bridle-path offering no cover. And, for all that it is reported to be held by hardly more than a score of men, a thousand cannot take it. There is no foothold at the summit for more than a dozen men at a time, and as for using guns against it, it were easier to mount a park of artillery upon a fiddle-string."

"Yet until San Leo is ours we are not fully masters of Urbino," said the duke. "We cannot leave the place in the hands of Fioravanti."

"We shall have to starve him out, then," said Della Volpe.

"And that would take a year at least," put in Corella, who had been gathering information. "They have great store of wheat and other victuals, and they are watered by a well in the inner bailey of the fortress. With few mouths to feed, as they have, they can hold us in check forever."

"There is a rumor to-day," said Della Volpe, "that the Lord Fioravanti is sick, and that it is feared he may not live."

"Not a doubt but Venice will say I poisoned him," said Cesare, sneering. "Still, even if he dies, it will be no gain to us. There is his castellan, Tolentino, to take his place; and Tolentino is the more obstinate of the two. We must consider some way to reduce them. Meanwhile, Taddeo, be vigilant, and hold the path against all."

Della Volpe inclined his head.

"I have taken all my measures for that," he said.

And now young Castrocaro stirred in his chair, leaning forward across the table.

"By your leave," said he, "those measures may not suffice."

Della Volpe frowned, rolled his single eye, which was preternaturally fierce, and scowled contemptuously upon this young cockerel whose pretense it seemed to be to teach that war-battered old captain the art of beleaguering.

"There is another way to reach San Leo," Castrocaro explained, and drew himself upon the attention of all, particularly the duke.

Castrocaro met with a confident smile this sudden and general alertness he had provoked.

"It is not," he explained, "such a way by which a company can go, but sufficient to enable a bold man who is acquainted with it to bear messages and, at need, even victuals into the fortress. Therefore it will be necessary that Messer della Volpe surround the entire base of the rock if he would be sure that none shall slip through his lines."

"You are certain of what you tell us?" asked the duke sharply.

"Certain!" echoed Castrocaro, and he smiled. "The way of which I speak lies mainly to the south of the rock. It is perilous even for a goat; yet it is practicable with care to one who knows it. Myself, as a boy, have made the ascent more often than I should have cared to tell my mother. In quest of an eagle's nest I have more than once reached the little plateau that thrusts out under the very wall of the fortress on the southern side. Thence, to enter the castle, all that would be needed would be a rope and a grappling-hook; for the wall is extremely low just there—not more than twelve feet high."

The duke pondered in silence the young soldier for some moments.

"I shall further consider this," he said at length. "Meanwhile, I thank you for the information. You have heard, Della Volpe? You will profit by what Castrocaro tells us, encircling the base entirely with your troops."

Della Volpe bowed, and upon that the council rose.

NEXT morning Cesare Borgia summoned Castrocaro to his presence. He received the young *condottiero* in the noble library of the palace, a spacious chamber, its lofty ceiling gloriously frescoed by Mantegna, its walls hung with costly tapestries and cloth of gold, its shelves

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stocked with a priceless and imposing array of volumes, all in manuscript; for, although the new German invention of the printing-press was already at work, by not a single vulgar production of that machine would Duke Guidobaldo have contaminated his cherished and marvelous collection.

At work at a table spread with papers sat the black-gowned figure of Agabito Gherardi, the duke's secretary.

"You have the acquaintance, have you not," quoth Cesare, "of Madonna Bianca, the daughter of Fioravanti of San Leo?"

Castrocaro, taken by surprise, flushed slightly despite his habitual self-possession, and his blue eyes, avoiding the duke's, considered the summer sky and the palace gardens through one of the windows that stood open to the broad marble balcony.

"I have that honor in some slight degree," he answered.

Cesare considered from his air and tone that the magician's golden elixir was hardly needed here as urgently as Madonna Bianca opined, and that what still was wanting to enchant him the sorcery of her beauty might accomplish unaided, as the magician had supposed. He smiled gently.

"You may improve that acquaintance if you so desire."

The young man threw back his head very haughtily.

"I do not understand your Potency," said he.

"You have my leave," the duke explained, "to convey in person to Madonna Bianca the news we have received that her father lies sick in San Leo."

Still the young man held himself loftily upon the defensive, as a young lover will.

"To what end this, Highness?" he inquired, his tone still haughty.

"Why, to what end but a Christian one, and"—the duke slightly lowered his voice to a confidential tone and smiled inscrutably—"a kindly purpose toward yourself? Still, if you distain the latter, for the former any other messenger will serve."

Ill at ease in his self-consciousness, a little mystified, yet well-content at heart, the *condottiero* bowed.

"I thank your Highness," he said. "Have I your leave to go?"

The duke nodded.

"You will wait upon me on your return. I may have other commands for you," he said, and so dismissed him.

AN HOUR later came Castrocaro back to the palace library in great haste and some excitement to seek the duke again.

"My lord," he cried, all in a trembling eagerness, "I have conveyed the message, and I am returned to crave a boon! Madonna Bianca besought of me in her affliction a written order to pass the lines of Della Volpe, that she might repair to her father."

"And you?" cried the duke sharply, his level brows drawn together by a frown.

The young captain's glance fell away. Obviously he was discouraged and abashed.

"I answered that I had no power to grant such an order, but—but that I would seek it of your Highness; that I knew you would not desire to hold a daughter from her father's side at such time."

"You know a deal," said Cesare sourly, "and you promise rashly. Precipitancy in making promises has never yet helped a man to greatness. Bear that in mind."

"But she was in such sore affliction!" cried Messer Lorenzo, protesting.

"Aye!" said the duke dryly. "And she used you so kindly, eyed you so fondly, gave you such sweet wine to drink that you had no strength to resist her soft appeal."

Cesare, watching his *condottiero* closely, observed the flicker of the young man's eyelids at the mention of the wine, and was satisfied. But even more fully was he to have the assurance that he sought.

"Have I been spied upon?" quoth Messer Lorenzo hotly.

Cesare shrugged contemptuously, not deigning to reply.

"You have leave to go," he said in curt dismissal.

But Messer Lorenzo was in a daring mood, and slow to obey.

"And the authority for Madonna Bianca to join her father?" he asked.

"There are good reasons why none should enter San Leo at present," was the cold reply. "Since you lay such store by it, I regret the necessity to deny you. But in time of war, necessity is inexorable."

Chagrined and downcast, the *condottiero* bowed and withdrew. Having promised, and finding himself now unable to fulfil

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the promise made to her over that cup of wine which she had brought him with her own fair hands, he dared not present himself to her again. Instead, he despatched a page to her with the unwelcome news of the duke's refusal.

Yet in this matter Cesare Borgia was oddly inconsistent. For hardly had Castrocaro left his presence than he turned to his white-faced secretary.

"Write me three lines to Della Volpe," said he, "ordering that if Madonna Bianca de' Fioravanti should attempt to steal through his lines and gain San Leo, he is to offer her no hindrance."

Agabito's round, pale countenance reflected his amazement at this order. But Cesare, surveying him, smiled inscrutably, and, from his knowledge of his master and that smile, Agabito perceived that Cesare was embarked upon one of those tortuous, subtle courses whose goal none could perceive until it had been reached. He bent to his task, and his pen scratched and spluttered briskly. Very soon a messenger bearing the order was on his way to Della Volpe's camp.

THAT very night Madonna Bianca considerately did what the duke expected of her. She slipped past the Borgia sentinels in the dark, and she was in San Leo by morning, though in Urbino none knew of this but Cesare, who had word of it privately from Della Volpe. Her palace by the Zoccolanti remained opened as if inhabited by her, but to all who came to seek her it was said that she was in ill health and kept her chamber. And among these was Lorenzo Castrocaro, who, upon being denied admittance on this plea, concluded that she was angry with him for having failed to do as he had promised, and thereafter grew silent and morose.

Two days after her flight came news of Fioravanti's death in the grim fortress he defended, and Castrocaro was despatched by the duke to Cesena on a mission which might well have been entrusted to a less important officer. It was ten days later when his immediate return was ordered, and, in view of the terms of that order, he went, upon reaching Urbino, all dust-laden as he was, into the duke's presence with the despatches that he bore.

Valentinois sat in council at the time, and Della Volpe, from the lines under San Leo, was in attendance.

"You are very opportunely returned," was his greeting of Messer Lorenzo, and he thrust aside, as of no consequence, the despatches which the latter brought. "We are met here to consider this resistance of San Leo, which is being conducted now by Tolentino with all the firmness that was Fioravanti's. We must make an end; and you are the man to accomplish it."

"I?" cried the young soldier.

"Sit," Cesare bade him, and obediently Castrocaro took a chair at the table. "Listen; you are to understand that I am not commanding you to do this thing, for I command no valued officer of mine so greatly to imperil his life. I but show you what is our need—what might be done by one who has your knowledge and whose heart is stout enough to bid him take the risk which the thing entails."

The *condottiero* nodded his understanding.

"You told us here," Cesare continued, "of a perilous way into San Leo which is known to few, and to yourself among those few. You said that if a man were to gain the plateau on the southern side of the rock's summit he might, with a rope and a grappling-hook, effect an entrance. Now, if a man were to do this at dead of night, choosing his time wisely so as to take the sentry unawares, stab that sentry and thereafter reach the gates and loose the bars, the rest would be an easy task. Della Volpe's troops would, meanwhile, have crept up by the bridle-path to wait the signal, upon which they would pour forth against the unbarred gate, and so San Leo be reduced at last with little loss of life."

Messer Lorenzo considered for some moments, the duke watching him.

"It is shrewd, he said approvingly. "It is shrewd and easy, and likely to succeed provided the man who goes is one who knows the rock and the fortress itself."

"Provided that, of course," said Cesare, and he looked steadily at the young man.

Messer Lorenzo bore that look a moment with the self-possession that was natural to him. Then, translating its quiet significance,

"I will go," he said quietly.

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"You have counted the cost of failure?" asked Cesare.

"It needs no counting. It is plain enough. A rope and a beam from the castle wall or a leap from the rock itself."

"Then, since who gambles should know not only what he may chance to lose but also the stake he stands to win," said the duke, "let me say that if you succeed I'll give you the governorship of the fortress with a stipend of ten thousand ducats."

Messer Lorenzo flushed in his agreeable surprise. His eyes sparkled, and his tone rang with youth's ready confidence.

"I will not fail," he promised. "When do I make the attempt?"

"To-morrow night, since you have resolved. See that you rest betwixt this and then to fit you for the fatigue of such an enterprise. And so, sirs, let us hope that we have found at last a solution to this riddle of San Leo."

YOU see, I hope, what Messer Castrocaro did not yet see, nor, for that matter, ever see—knowing nothing of what had happened on the night when the duke visited Messer Corvinus Trismegistus. You see in the duke's choice of him for this enterprise an instance of that fine discrimination with which Cesare picked his instruments.

Macchiavelli, who studied the duke at close quarters and who worshiped him as the very embodiment of all the virtues of princeship, was no doubt inspired by the duke's unerring wisdom in the choice of ministers to devote to the subject a chapter of his "Prince."

> The first conjecture made of a prince and of his intellectual capacity [he writes] should be based upon a consideration of the men by whom he surrounds himself, and when these are faithful to him and sufficient for his occasions, he is to be accounted a wise prince for having chosen them sufficient and kept them faithful.

Macchiavelli writes thus no more than Cesare might himself have written had he theorized upon princeship instead of practising it. Indeed, it is upon Cesare Borgia's practises—as Macchiavelli half admits in one place—that the Florentine founded his theories. So that it is hardly an overstatement to say that, while Macchiavelli wrote "The Prince," Cesare Borgia was its real author, since his were the conceptions and actions that Macchiavelli converted into precepts.

You see him here selecting for this task one who, although the youngest among all his captains, was yet undoubtedly the most sufficient for his particular need. And observe the quality of his sufficiency. In a measure it was adventitious, depending upon Castrocaro's chance acquaintance with that back way up the rock of San Leo. But in greater measure it was the result of Cesare's clever manipulation of circumstances. From now onward all happens precisely as he had designed. He had discovered certain forces, and he had harnessed them to his needs, setting them upon a course by him predetermined and marked out.

He realized that chance might disturb their career and fling them out of that course, but he did not depend upon chance to bear them to the goal at which he aimed them.

On the afternoon of the following day, thoroughly rested and refreshed, Messer Lorenzo Castrocaro rode out of Urbino with a body-guard of a half-dozen of his men-at-arms and took the road to Della Volpe's camp under San Leo. He arrived there without mishap toward nightfall, and having supped with the commander of the beleaguerers in the latter's tent, he thereafter completed his preparations. Toward the third hour of night he set out alone upon his perilous undertaking.

To lessen the risk of being perceived by any watcher in the castle, he had dressed himself entirely in black, taking the precaution to put on under his doublet a shirt of mail, which, while dagger-proof, was so finely wrought that your two cupped hands might contain it. He was armed with sword and dagger, and bandolier-wise about his body was coiled a rope, to which he had attached a strong double-pronged grappling-hook, very broad in the bend, all swathed in straw. This had been carefully and firmly adjusted upon his back, so that it would not hamper his movements.

With Della Volpe he had concerted that the latter, at the head of fifty men, should quietly approach the fortress by the bridle-path, and, having gained the summit, lie concealed until the gate should be opened by Castrocaro himself. Then they

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were instantly to spring forward, and so effect an entrance.

It was a fine, clear night of summer, and a full moon rode in the heavens, rendering the landscape visible for miles. This was well for the earlier part of Messer Lorenzo's climb; and before midnight, by when he hoped to reach the summit, that moon would have set and darkness would lend him cover.

Alone, then, he set out and made his way round to the southern side of the great precipitous hill, on the crest of which the bulk and towers of the fortress showed gray in the white moonlight.

At first the ascent was easy, and he was able to go forward swiftly; soon, however, the precipice grew more abrupt, the foothold became scantier, and in places failed almost entirely, so that his progress was retarded, and for his life's sake he was compelled to move with infinite caution, husbanding his strength against the still more strenuous labor that lay before him.

Hesitation or doubt he had none. It was a good ten years since last, in boyhood, he had scaled those heights; but boyhood's memories are tenacious, and he was as confident of his way as if he had trodden it but yesterday.

AT THE end of an hour he had not accomplished more than a third of the ascent, and the most difficult part of it was yet to come. He sat down on a grassy ledge, unusually spacious, and there he rested him a while and recovered breath.

Thence he viewed the Emilian plain, revealed for miles in the moon's white light, the glittering, silvery spread of sea away in the distance to the east, the glimmering snow-capped peaks of the Apennines to westward. Above him towered the gray cliff, abrupt and sheer as the very walls of the fortress that crowned its summit, a climb that well might have appalled the hardiest mountaineer, that might, indeed, have baffled even a goat. Surveying it with his calm blue eyes, Messer Lorenzo realized that the worst danger he had to face that night was the danger of this climb. By comparison, the rest—the scaling of the castle wall, the poniarding of a sentry or two and the opening of the gate—were safe and simple matters. Here, however, a false step, a misgiving, even, or a moment of giddiness, such as might well beset him, must plunge him down to instant death.

He rose, inhaled the fragrance of the summer night, breathed a short prayer to his patron saint, the holy Lawrence, and pushed on. Clinging with hands and feet and knees to the face of the cliff, he edged along a narrow strip of rock for some few yards to another ledge; there he paused to breathe again, thankful that so much was accomplished.

Thereafter for a while the going was easier. A natural path, some three feet wide, wound upward along the precipice's face. At the end of this he was confronted by another gap, to be surmounted only by a leap.

Fearing lest his sword should trip him, he unbuckled his belt and cast the weapon from him. He did so with regret, but constrained to it by the reflection that if he kept it he might never live to need it. Then he took a deep breath, seized his courage in both hands and jumped across the black, unfathomable void at a stunted tree that thrust out from that sheer wall. With arms and legs he clutched like an ape at the frail plant, and had its hold given way under his weight, there would have been an end of him forthwith. It held, however, and, clinging to it, he groped for foothold, found it and went on. This brought him to a narrow fissure in the cliff. Up this fissure he swarmed, supported by just the pressure of knees and forearms against the rock, and only at times finding a projection affording a safer grip for one or the other.

Up, straight up he went for nearly twenty feet, until at last he reached the fissure's summit; one of its walls permitted him to get astride it, and there he rested, bathed in sweat and winded by the stupendous exertions he had put forth. Seated thus, his breast close against the cliff, he looked sideways and down into the awful depths below him. He shuddered, and clung with his bruised hands to the rock, and it was some time before he could proceed upon the second half of his ascent, for by now he was a good mid-way.

At last he resumed his climb, and by similar means and surmounting similar and constant perils, he pushed on.

One narrow escape he had. As he clung with both hands to that awful wall at a

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place where the foothold was but a few inches wide, a great brown body, with a shrieking whir, dashed out of a crevice just above his head and went cawing and circling in the void beyond. So startled was he that he almost loosed his hold, and a cold sweat broke out upon his roughened skin as he recovered and knew the thing for what it was. And later, when an hour or so before midnight the moon went down and left him in utter darkness, fear at last assailed his stout spirit, and for a time he did not dare to move. Presently, however, as he grew accustomed to the gloom, his eyes were able to pierce it to an extent that restored his courage. The night, after all, was clear and starlit, and at close quarters objects were just visible; yet immense care was necessary lest he should now commit the irreparable error of mistaking substance for shadow or should misjudge his distances.

AT LENGTH, toward midnight, utterly spent, with bleeding hands and rent garments, he found himself on the roomy platform at the very foot of the castle's southern wall; and not for all the wealth of the world would he have consented to return by the way he had so miraculously ascended—for miraculous did he now account it that he should have reached his goal in safety. He flung himself down full length, there at the foot of the wall, to rest a while before attempting the escalade. And what time he rested he whispered a prayer of thankfulness for his preservation so far, for a devout soul was this Messer Lorenzo.

He looked up at the twinkling stars, out at the distant sheen of the Adriatic, down at the clustering hamlets in the plain far below him, from which so painfully he had climbed. Immediately above his head he could hear the steady, measured tread of the sentry, approaching, passing and receding again, as the man patrolled the embattled parapet. Thrice did the fellow pass that way before Castrocaro stirred; and when at length he rose, as the steps were fading in the distance for the third time, he felt a certain pity for the soldier whose spirit he must inevitably liberate from its earthly prison-house that night.

He uncoiled the rope from his body, stood back and swung the grappling-hook a moment, taking aim, then hurled it upward. It soared above the wall and fell beyond, between two merlons, then thudded softly against the masonry, the straw in which he had the foresight to swathe it muffling the sound of the metal.

He pulled gently at the rope, hoping that the hooks would fasten upon some projection in the stone or lodge within some crevice. But neither happened. The hooks came to the summit of the wall and toppled back, falling at his feet. Again he repeated the operation, with a like result; but at the third attempt the hooks took hold. He swung his entire weight upon the rope to test the grip, and found that it held firmly.

But now the sentry's return warned him that the moment was unpropitious. So he waited, intently listening, crouching at the wall's foot, until the man had passed.

Then he began the ascent in sailor-fashion, hauling himself up hand over hand, his feet against the masonry to lighten the labor of his arms. Thus he came swiftly to the top of the wall, and knelt there between two merlons, peering down into the black courtyard. All was silent. Save for the tramp of the sentry, who was now turning the northwestern angle of the ramparts, as Messer Lorenzo rightly judged, no sound disturbed the stillness of the place.

He loosed the hooks from the crevice in which they had fastened. He flung them wide, the rope with them, and sent them hurtling over the precipice, that there might be no evidence of the manner of his coming. Then he dropped softly down upon the parapet, exulting to realize that his journey was accomplished and that he was within the fortress.

His mission was all but ended. The rest was easy. Within a few moments the Borgia troops would be pouring into San Leo, and the soldiers of the garrison, surprised in their beds, would make a very ready surrender. It no longer appeared even necessary to Messer Lorenzo to butcher that single sentry. If he but wisely chose his moment for the unbarring of the gates, the whole thing might be done without the man's suspicions being roused until it was too late. Indeed, it was the safer course; for, after all, if he

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came to grapple with the soldier, there was always the chance that the fellow might cry out and give the alarm before Castrocaro could despatch him.

Resolved thus upon that score, he moved forward swiftly yet very cautiously, and gained a flight of stone steps that wound down into the inner bailey. This he descended, and so reached the quadrangle. Round this vast square he moved, keeping well within the shadows, until he came to the gateway opening upon a passage that ran past the guard-room on one side and the chapel on the other into the outer bailey of the fortress.

In this gateway he crouched, and waited until the sentry, who was coming round again, should have passed once more to the castle's northern side. No window overlooking the courtyard showed a single light; the place was wrapped in slumber.

Messer Lorenzo waited calmly, his pulse quite regular. Should the door be locked, then he must return, deal with the sentry and make his way to the main gates by the battlements. But it was unlikely that such would be the case.

High up, immediately before him upon the ramparts, he saw the sentry passing slowly, pike on shoulder, a black shadow dimly outlined against the blue-black, star-flecked dome of sky. He watched him as he passed on and round, all unsuspicious, and so vanished once more. Then, very softly, Messer Lorenzo tried the latch of that big door. It yielded silently to his pressure and a black tunnel gaped before him. He entered it and very softly closed the door again on the inside. Then he paused, reflecting that were he to go straight forward and pass out into the northern court, he must risk detection by the sentry, who was now on the northern battlements. Therefore he must wait until the fellow should come round again.

AT LAST he caught the sound of the sentry's step approathing along the parapet. Satisfied that he had waited long enough, he made shift to grope his way through the black darkness of that passage. And then, even as he turned, his heart almost stood still. Upon the chapel door, at the height of some three feet, there was a tiny oval splash of light, along the ground at the same spot a yellow gleam, long and narrow as a sword-blade. Instantly he understood. The guard-room, whose windows looked upon the northern court, was still tenanted, and what he beheld was the light that shone through the keyhole and under the door.

A moment he paused, considering. Then he perceived that, having come so far, he must go on. To retreat and reopen the door would be fraught with the greater risk, while to linger in the passage would be but to increase the already imminent danger of discovery. His only chance of winning through lay in going forward at once, taking care to make no sound that should reach those within. Thus, no doubt, all would be well. With extremest caution, then, he stepped forward on tiptoe, his hands upon the wall on the chapel side to guide and steady him.

Not more than three or four steps had he taken when quite suddenly an oath rang out in a deep male voice, followed by the laughter of several men. With that there was a scraping of chairs, and heavy steps came tramping toward the door.

With this door Messer Lorenzo was now level, and, being startled, he made his one mistake. Had he taken the risk of speeding forward swiftly, he might even now have won safely to the outer bailey. But he hung there, hesitating, again considering retreat, even, his every sinew taut. And that pause was his ruin. In a moment he realized it, saw that he was trapped, that retreat was now utterly hopeless and that to go forward was no better. Therefore, with set teeth and angry misery in his soul to reflect that he had won so far and at such peril only to fail upon the very threshold of success, he stood at bay to meet what he no longer could avoid.

The door was pulled open from within, and a flood of light poured out into that black place, revealing Messer Lorenzo, white of face, with staring eyes, one hand instinctively upon his poniard-hilt, poised there as if for a spring.

Thus did the foremost of the five men who issued behold him, and at sight of him all checked abruptly, staring. This foremost one, a big, heavily built fellow all clad in leather, black-browed and bearded, seemed in some slight measure the superior of those other four. All five were very obviously soldiers.

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He fell back in sheer amazement, startled, even, by the sight of Messer Lorenzo. Then, recovering, he set his arms akimbo, planted wide his feet and looked our gentleman over with the deepest interest.

"Now, who the devil may you be?" he demanded.

Messer Lorenzo's wits were ever very ready, and in that moment he had a flash of inspiration. He stepped forward easily in answer to that challenge, and so came more fully into the light.

"I am glad to see there is some one alive and awake in San Leo," he said; and he seemed to sneer, as one who had the right to utter a reproof.

On the faces of those five men amazement grew and spread. Looking beyond them into the room, which was lighted by torches set in iron sconces in the walls, Messer Lorenzo beheld the explanation of the silence they had kept. There was a table on which remained spread a pack of greasy cards. They had been at play.

"Body of God," he went on, "you keep a fine watch here! The Borgian soldiery may be at your very gates. I myself can effect an entrance, and no man to hinder or challenge me, or so much as give the alarm. By the Host, were you men of mine, I should find work for you in the kitchen, and hope that you'd give a better account of yourselves as scullions than you do as soldiers."

"Now, who the devil may you be, I say?" again demanded the black-browed warrior, scowling more truculently than before.

"And how the devil come you here?" cried another, a slender, loose-lipped fellow, with a wart on his nose, who pushed forward to survey the intruder at closer quarters.

Castrocaro on the instant became very haughty.

"Take me to your captain—to Messer Tolentino," he demanded. "He shall learn what manner of watch you keep. You dogs, the place might be burned about your ears while you sit there, cheating one another at cards, and set a fellow who appears to be both deaf and blind to pace your walls."

The note of cool authority in his voice produced its effect. They were entirely duped by it. That a man should so address them whose right to do so was not entirely beyond question seemed to them—as it might, indeed—altogether incredible.

"Messer Tolentino is abed," said the big fellow in a surly voice.

They did not like the laugh with which Castrocaro received that information.

"I nothing doubt it from the manner of your watch," he sneered. "Well then, up and rouse him for me!"

"But who is he, after all, Bernardo?" insisted the loose-lipped stripling of their leader. And the others grunted their approval of a question that at least possessed the virtue of being timely.

"Aye," quoth black-browed Bernardo. "You have not told us who you are." His tone lay between truculence and sulky deference.

"I am an envoy from the Lord Guidobaldo, your duke," was the ready and unfaltering answer; and the young *condottiero* wondered in his heart whither all this would lead him, and what chance of saving himself might offer yet.

Their deference was obviously increased.

"But how came you in?" insisted the one who already had posed that question.

Messer Lorenzo waved the question and questioner impatiently aside.

"What matters that?" quoth he. "Enough that I am here. Are we to trifle away the night in silly questions? Have I not told you that the Borgia troops may at this moment be at your very gates?"

"By Bacchus, they may stay there!" laughed another. "The gates of San Leo are strong enough, my master. And should the Borgia rabble venture to knock, we shall know how to answer them."

But even as the fellow was speaking, Bernardo fetched a lanthorn from the room and shouted to them to follow him. They went down the passage toward the door leading to the outer bailey. They crossed the courtyard together, pestering the supposed envoy with questions, which he answered curtly and ungraciously, showing them by his every word and gesture that it was not his habit to herd with such as they.

THUS they came to the door of the maschio tower, where Messer Tolentino had his dwelling; and, what time they paused there, Castrocaro sent a fond glance

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in the direction of the great gates, beyond which Della Volpe and his men were waiting. He was so near them that to reach and unbar those gates would be an instant's work; but the way to rid himself of those five dogs of war was altogether beyond his devising. And now the sentry on the walls above peered down and hailed them to know whom they had with them, and the young *condottiero* prayed that thus Della Volpe, who must be intently on the watch without, might have warning that he was taken. Yet at the same time he knew full well that, even so, Della Volpe would be powerless to assist him. He had but his own wits upon which he could depend, and he realized how desperate was his situation.

UP A winding staircase, the walls and ceilings very rudely frescoed, they led Messer Lorenzo to the apartments of Tolentino, the castellan, who had been ruler of San Leo since the death, ten days ago, of the Lord Fioravanti.

As he went, the young *condottiero* took heart once more. So far, all had gone well. He had played his part shrewdly, and his demeanor had so successfully imposed upon the men that no shadow of suspicion did they entertain. Could he but succeed in similarly befooling their captain, it might well be that he should be assigned some chamber from which he anon might slip forth to do the thing he had come to do.

As he went, he prepared the tale he was to tell, and he based it upon his knowledge that Fioravanti's resistance of Cesare Borgia had been almost in opposition to the wishes of Duke Guidobaldo—that mild and gentle scholar who had desired all fortresses to make surrender, since no ultimate gain could lie in resistance.

The difficulty for Messer Lorenzo lay in the fact that Tolentino would desire to see credentials—and he had none to offer.

He was kept waiting in an antechamber what time the big Bernardo went to rouse the castellan and to inform that grumbling captain that an envoy from Duke Guidobaldo had stolen into the castle and was seeking him. No more than just that did Bernardo tell. But it was enough.

The castellan roused himself at once with a wealth of oaths, first incoherent, then horribly coherent; he shook his great nightcapped head, thrust out a pair of long hairy legs from the coverlet, and sat up on the bed's edge to receive this envoy, whom he made Bernardo to admit.

Messer Lorenzo, very uneasy in his heart, but very haughty and confident in his bearing, entered and gave the captain a lofty salutation.

"You are from Duke Guidobaldo?" growled Messer Tolentino.

"I am," said Castrocaro. "And had I been from Cesare Borgia, with a score of men at my heels, I could by now have been master of San Leo, so zealous are your watchers."

It was shrewdly conceived, because it seemed to state an obvious truth that was well calculated to disarm suspicion. But the tone he took, though well enough with men-at-arms, was a mighty dangerous one to take with a castellan of such importance and such a fierce, ungovernable temper as was notoriously Messer Tolentino's. It flung that gentleman very naturally into a rage, and might well have earned the speaker a broken head upon the instant. This Messer Lorenzo knew and risked; for he also knew that it must earn him confidence, both for the reason already given and also because it must be inferred that only a person very sure of himself would dare to voice such a reproof.

Tolentino stared at him out of fierce, blood-injected eyes, too much taken aback to find an answer for a moment. He was a tall, handsome, big-nosed man, with black hair, an olive, shaven face, and a long, square chin. He stared on a while and then exploded.

"Blood of God!" he roared. "Here is a cockerel with a very noisy cackle! We'll mend that for you ere you leave us," he promised viciously. "Who are you?"

"An envoy from Duke Guidobaldo, as you have been informed. As for the rest—the cockerel and the cackle—we will discuss it at some other time."

The castellan heaved himself up.

"You pert lap-dog!" said he, between anger and amazement. He breathed gustily, words failing him, and then grew calmer. "What is your name?"

"Lorenzo Snello," answered Castrocaro, who had been prepared for the question, and he added sternly, "I like it better than the one you have just bestowed upon me."

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The door was pulled open, revealing Messer Lorenzo, white of face, with staring eyes, one hand instinctively upon his poniard-hilt, poised there as if for a spring.

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"Are you come hither to tell me what you like?" bellowed the castellan. "Look you, young sir; I am the master here, and here my will is law. I can flog you, flay you or hang you, and give account of it to none. Bear you that in mind, and——"

"Oh, peace!" cried Messer Lorenzo in his turn, waving a contemptuous hand and dominating the other by his very tone and manner. "Whatever I may have come for, I have not come to listen to your vaporings. Have I climbed from the plain, risked my life to get through the Borgia lines and my neck a score of times in the ascent to stand here and have you bellow at me of what you imagine you can do? What you cannot do I have seen for myself."

"And what may that be?" quoth Tolentino, now wickedly gentle.

"You cannot guard a castle, and you cannot discriminate between a lackey and one who is your peer and perhaps something more."

THE castellan sat down again and rubbed his chin. Here was a very hot fellow, and, like all bullies, Messer Tolentino found that hot fellows put him out of countenance.

In the background, behind Messer Lorenzo, stood Tolentino's men in line, silent but avid witnesses of his discomfiture. The castellan perceived that at all costs he must save his face.

"You'll need a weighty message to justify this insolence and to save you from a whipping," said he gravely.

"I'll need no weightier a message than the one I bear," was the sharp answer. "The duke shall hear of these indignities to which you are subjecting one he loves and who has run great peril in his service." His dignity, his air of injury were now overwhelming. "And mark you, sir, it is not the way to treat an envoy, this. Were my duty to the duke less than it is, or my message of less moment, I should depart as I have come. But he shall hear of the reception I have had, rest assured of that."

Tolentino shuffled, ill at ease now.

"Sir," he cried, protesting, "I swear the fault is yours! Who, pray, are you, to visit me with your reproofs? If I have failed in courtesy, it was you provoked me. Am I to bear the gibes of every popinjay who thinks he can discharge my duties better than can I? Enough, sir!" He waved a great hand, growing dignified in his turn. "Deliver the message that you bear." And he held out that massive hand of his in expectation of a letter.

But Messer Lorenzo's pretense was, of necessity, that he bore his message by word of mouth.

"I am bidden by my lord to enjoin you to make surrender with the honors of war, which shall be conceded you by the Duke of Valentinois," said he; and seeing the surprise, doubt and suspicion that instantly began to spread upon Tolentino's face for all to read, he launched himself into explanations. "Cesare Borgia has made terms with Duke Guidobaldo, and has promised him certain compensations if all the fortresses of his dominions make surrender without more ado. These terms my lord has been advised to accept, since by refusing them nothing can he hope to gain, while he may lose all. Perceiving this, and satisfied that by prolonging its resistance San Leo can only be postponing its ultimately inevitable surrender and entailing by that postponement the loss of much valuable life, Duke Guidobaldo has sent me to bid you in his name capitulate forthwith."

It had a specious ring. It was precisely such a message as the humanitarian duke might well have sent, and the profit to accrue to himself from the surrender he enjoined seemed also a likely enough contingency. Yet the shrewd Tolentino had his doubts—doubts which might never have assailed another. Wrinkles increased about his fierce black eyes as he bent them now upon the messenger.

"You will have letters of this tenor from my lord?" he said.

"I have none," replied Messer Lorenzo, dissembling his uneasiness.

"Now, by Bacchus, that is odd!"

"Nay, sir, consider," said the young man too hastily, "the danger of my carrying such letters. Should they be found upon me by the Borgia troops, I—" He checked, somewhat awkwardly, perceiving his mistake.

Tolentino smacked his thigh with his open palm, and the room rang with the sound. His face grew red. He sprang up.

"Sir, sir," said he, with a certain grimness, "we must understand each other

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better. You say that you bring me certain orders to act upon a certain matter that has been concerted between Valentinois and my lord, and you talk of danger to yourself in bearing such orders in a letter. Be patient with me if I do not understand." Tolentino's accents were unmistakably sardonic. "So desirable is it from the point of view of Valentinois that such commands should reach me that he could not have failed to pass you unmolested through his troops. Can you explain where I am wrong in these conclusions?"

There but remained for Messer Lorenzo to put upon the matter the best face possible. A gap was yawning at his feet. He saw it all too plainly.

"That explanation my lord, no doubt, will furnish you, should you seek it from him. I hold it not. It was not given me, nor had I the presumption to request it." He spoke calmly and proudly, for all that his heart-beats had quickened, and in his last words there was a certain veiled reproof of the other's attitude. "When," he continued, "I said that it would have been dangerous to have given me letters, I but put forward, to answer you, the explanation which occurred to me at the moment. I had not earlier considered the matter. I now see that I was wrong in my assumption."

MESSER TOLENTINO considered him very searchingly. Throughout his speech, indeed, the castellan's eyes had never left his face. Messer Lorenzo's words all but convinced Tolentino that the man was lying. Yet his calm and easy assurance, his proud demeanor left the captain still a lingering doubt.

"At least you'll bear some sign by which I am to know that you are indeed my lord's envoy?" said he.

"I bear none. I was despatched in haste. The duke, it seems, did not reckon upon such a message as this being doubted."

"Did he not?" quoth Tolentino, and his note was sardonic. Suddenly he asked another question: "How came you to enter the fortress?"

"I climbed up from the plain on the southern side, where the rock is accounted inaccessible." And, seeing the look of surprise that overspread the captain's face, "I am of these parts," he explained. "In boyhood I have frequently essayed the climb. It was for this reason that Duke Guidobaldo chose me."

"And when you had gained the wall, did you bid the sentry lower you a rope?"

"I did not. I had a rope of my own, and grappling-hooks."

"Why this, when you are a messenger from Guidobaldo?" The castellan turned sharply to his men. "Where did you find him?" he inquired.

It was Bernardo who made haste to answer that they had found him lurking in the passage outside the guard-room as they were coming out.

Tolentino laughed with fierce relish, and swore copiously and humorously.

"So ho!" he crowed. "You had passed the sentry unperceived, and you were well within the fortress ere suddenly you were discovered, when—behold!—you become a messenger of Guidobaldo, bearing orders to me to surrender the fortress, and you take this high tone about our indifferent watch to cover the sly manner of your entrance. Oh ho! 'Twas shrewdly thought of, but it shall not avail you—though it be a pity to wring the neck of so spirited a cockerel." And he laughed again.

"You are a fool," said Castrocaro, with finality, "and you reason like a fool."

"Do I so? Now, mark me. You said that it was because you knew a secret way into this castle that Guidobaldo chose you for his messenger. Consider now the folly of that statement. You might yourself have construed that Guidobaldo's wish was that you should come hither secretly, though yourself you have admitted the obvious error of such an assumption. But to tell me that an envoy from the duke, bidding us surrender to Cesare Borgia, and so do the will of the latter, should need to come here by secret ways at the risk of his neck—" Tolentino shrugged and laughed in the white face of Messer Lorenzo. "Which of us is the fool in this, sir?" he questioned, leering. Then, with an abrupt change of manner, he waved to his men. "Seize and search him!" he commanded.

In a moment they had him down upon the floor and they were stripping him of his garments. They made a very thorough search, but it yielded nothing.

"No matter," said Tolentino, as he got

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into bed again. "We have more than enough against him already. Make him safe for the night. He shall go down the cliff's face again in the morning, and I swear he shall go down faster than ever he came up."

And Messer Tolentino rolled over and settled down comfortably to go to sleep again.

LOCKED in the guard-house—since a man who was to die so soon was not worth the trouble of consigning to a dungeon—Messer Lorenzo Castrocaro spent, as you may conceive, a somewhat troubled night. He was too young and too full of life and the zest and warmth of it to be indifferent about quitting it to look with apathy upon death. He had seen death—and a deal of it—in the past two years of his martial career. But it had been the death of others, and never, until now, had it seemed to him that death was a thing that very much concerned himself. Even when he had imagined that he realized the dangers before him in this enterprise of San Leo, he had felt a certain confidence that it was not for him to die. He was, in fact, in that phase of youth and vigor when a man seems to himself immortal. And even now that he lay on the wooden bench in the guard-room in the dark, he could hardly conceive that the end of him was really at hand. Surely death was too great a business to be heralded so quietly.

He sighed wearily and sought to find a more comfortable position on his pitilessly hard couch. He thought of many things—of his past life, of early boyhood, of his mother, of his companions in arms and of martial feats accomplished. He saw himself hacking a way through the living barrier that blocked the breach in the wall of Forli, or riding with Valentinois in the mighty charge that routed the Colonna under Capua; and he had a singularly vivid vision of the dead men he had beheld on those occasions and how they had looked in death. So would he look to-morrow, his reason told him. But still his imagination refused to picture it.

Then his thoughts shifted to Madonna Bianca de' Fioravanti, whom he would never see again. For months he had experienced an odd tenderness for that lady of a sweetly melancholy order, and in secret he had committed some atrocious verses in her honor.

It had been no great affair when all was said. There had been other and more ardent loves in his short life; yet Madonna Bianca had evoked in him a tenderer regard, a holier feeling than any other woman that he had known. Indeed, the contrast was as sharp as that which lies between sacred and profane love. Perhaps it was because she was so unattainable, so distant, so immeasurably above him, the daughter of a great lord, the representative to-day of a great house, while he was but a *condottiero*, an adventurer who had for patrimony no more than his wits and his sword. He sighed. It would have been sweet to have seen her again before dying—to have poured out the story of his love as a swan pours out its death-song. Yet, after all, it did not greatly matter.

You see that his examination of conscience in that supreme hour had little to do with the making of his soul.

He wondered would she hear of the end he had made, and whether, hearing, she would pity him a little—whether, indeed, she would do so much as remember him. It was odd, he reflected, that he should come to meet his end in the very castle that had been her father's. Yet he was glad that it was not her father's hand that measured out to him this death that he must die to-morrow.

Physically exhausted as he was by the exertions of his climb, he fell at last into a fitful slumber; and when next he wakened it was to find the morning sunlight pouring through the tall windows of his prison.

He had been roused by the grating of a key in the lock, and as he sat up, stiff and sore, on his hard couch, the door opened and to him entered Bernardo, followed by six soldiers, all in their harness.

"A good day to you," said Bernardo civilly, but a trifle thoughtlessly, considering what the day had in store for Messer Lorenzo.

The young man smiled as he swung his feet to the ground.

"A better day to you," said he; and thus earned by his pleasantry and his debonair manner the esteem of the gruff soldier.

It had come to Messer Lorenzo that, since die he must, the thing would be best done jocosely. Lamentations would not

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avail him. Let him, then, be blithe. Perhaps, after all, death were not so fearful a business as priests represented it; and as for that flaming hell that lies agape for young men who have drunk of the lusty cup of their youth, there would be shrift for him before he went.

He rose and ran his fingers through his long, fair hair, which had become tousled. Then he looked at his hands, grimy and bruised from yesternight's adventure, and begged Bernardo to fetch him water.

Bernardo's brows went up in surprise. The labor of washing did not seem a reasonable thing to him under the circumstances. Outside, in the courtyard, a drum began to beat a call. Bernardo thrust out a dubious lip.

"Messer Tolentino is awaiting you," he said.

"I know," replied Castrocaro. "You would not have me present myself thus before him. It were to show a lack of proper respect for the hangman."

Bernardo shrugged and gave an order to one of his men. The fellow set his pike in a corner and went out, to return presently with an iron basin full of water. This he placed upon the table. Messer Lorenzo thanked him pleasantly, removed his doublet and shirt, and, stripped to the waist, he proceeded to make the best toilet that he could as briefly as possible.

WASHED and refreshed, his garments dusted and their disarray repaired, he acknowledged himself ready. The men marched him out into the open, where the impatient castellan awaited him.

With a firm step, his head high and his cheeks but little paler than their habit, Messer Lorenzo came into the spacious inner bailey of the castle. He glanced wistfully at the cobalt sky, and then considered the line of soldiers drawn up in the courtyard, all in their harness of steel and leather, with the gray walls of the fortress for their background. Not more than thirty men in all did they number, and they composed the castle's entire garrison.

A little in front of them the tall castellan was pacing slowly. He was all in black, in mourning for his late master, the Lord Fioravanti, and his hand rested easily upon the hilt of his sheathed sword, thrusting the weapon up behind. He halted at the approach of the doomed prisoner, and the men surrounding the latter fell away, leaving him face to face with Messer Tolentino.

The castellan considered him sternly for a little while, and Messer Lorenzo bore the inspection well, his deep-blue eyes returning the other's solemn glance intrepidly. At last the captain spoke.

"I do not know what was your intent in penetrating here last night, save that it was traitorous; that much the lies you told me have made plain, and for that you are to suffer death."

"For death I am prepared," said Messer Lorenzo coolly; "but I implore you to spare me the torture of a funeral oration before I go. My fortitude may not be equal to so much, particularly when you consider that I have had no breakfast."

Tolentino smiled sourly, considering him.

"Very well," said he. And then, "You will not tell me who you are and what you sought here?"

"I have told you already, but you choose to discredit what I say. What need, then, for further words? It were but to weary you and me. Let us get to the hanging, which, from the general look of you, is no doubt a matter that you understand better."

"Ha!" said Tolentino.

But now quite suddenly, from the line of men there was one who, having heard, made bold to call out,

"Sir Captain, I can tell you who he is." The captain wheeled sharply upon the man-at-arms who had made the announcement. "He is Messer Lorenzo Castrocaro."

"One of Valentinois' *condottieri!*" exclaimed Tolentino.

"The same, Sir Captain," the man assured him; and Messer Lorenzo, looking, recognized one who had served under his own banner some months since.

He shrugged indifferently at the captain's very evident satisfaction.

"What odds?" he said. "One name will serve as well as another to die under."

"And how," quoth the captain, "would you prefer to die? You shall have your choice."

"Of old age, I think," said Messer Lorenzo airily, and heard the titter that responded to his sally. But Tolentino scowled, displeased.

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"I mean, sir, will you be hanged or will you leap from the ledge to which you climbed last night?"

"Why, that, now, is a very different matter. You circumscribe the choice. Appoint for me, I pray, the death that will afford you the greater diversion."

Tolentino considered him, stroking his long chin, his brows wrinkled. He liked the fellow for his intrepid daring in the face of death. But—he was castellan of San Leo, and knew his duty.

"Why," said he slowly, at length, "we know that you can climb like an ape. Let us see if you can fly like a bird. Take him up to the ramparts yonder."

"Ah, but stay!" cried Messer Castrocaro, with suddenly startled thoughts of those sins of his youth and with a certain corollary hope. "Are you all pagans in San Leo? Is a Christian to be thrust across the black edge of death unshriven?"

Tolentino frowned, as if impatient of this fresh motive for delay; then he signed shortly to Bernardo.

"Go fetch the priest," said he, and thus dashed that faint, sly hope Messer Lorenzo had been harboring that the place might contain no priest, and that these men, being faithful children of Mother Church, would never dare to slay unshriven a man who asked for shrift.

Bernardo went. He gained the chapel door on the very pronouncement of the "*Ite; missa est,*" just as the morning mass was ended, and on the threshold, in his haste, he all but stumbled against a lady in black who was coming forth attended by two women. He drew aside, muttering words of apology.

But the lady did not at once pass on.

"Why all this haste to chapel?" quoth she, accounting it strangely unusual in one of Tolentino's men.

"Messer Father Girolamo is required," said he. "There is a man about to die who must be shriven."

"A man?" said she, with a show of tender solicitude, conceiving that one of the all too slender garrison had been wounded to the death.

"Aye, a captain of Valentino's—one Lorenzo Castrocaro—who came hither in the night. And," he added vaingloriously, "it was I, *madonna*, who took him."

But the Lady Bianca de' Fioravanti never heard his last words. She fell back a step, and rested, as if for support, against one of the diminutive pillars of the porch. Her face had become deathly white.

"What—what is his name, did you say?" she faltered.

"Lorenzo Castrocaro—a captain of Valentino's," he repeated.

"Lorenzo Castrocaro?" she said in her turn, but on her lips the name seemed another, so differently did she utter it.

"Aye, *madonna*," he replied.

Suddenly she gripped his arm.

"And he is wounded—to the death?" she cried, with a sudden fierceness, as it seemed to him.

"Nay; not wounded. He is to die, having been captured. That is all. Messer Tolentino will have him jump from the rock. You will have a good view from the battlements, *madonna*. It is——"

She released his arm and fell back from him in horror, cutting short his praise of the entertainment provided.

"Take me to your captain!" she commanded.

He stared at her, bewildered.

"And the priest?" he inquired.

"Let that wait. Take me to your captain!"

The command was so imperious that he dared not disobey her. He bowed, muttering in his beard, and, turning, went up the passage again, and so out into the courtyard, the lady and her women following.

ACROSS the intervening space Madonna Bianca's eyes met the proud glance of Messer Lorenzo's, and saw the sudden abatement of that pride, saw the faint flush that stirred at sight of her in those pale cheeks. For to the young man this was a startling apparition, seeing that he had no knowledge or even suspicion of her presence in San Leo.

A moment she paused, looked at him, her soul in her eyes; then she swept forward, past Bernardo, her women ever following her. Thus came she, very pale but very resolute of mien, to the captain of her fortress.

Messer Tolentino bowed profoundly, uncovering, and at once explained the situation.

"Here is a young adventurer, *madonna*, whom we captured last night within these

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walls," said he. "He is a captain in the service of Cesare Borgia."

She looked at the prisoner again standing rigid before her, and from the prisoner to her officer.

"How came he here?" she asked, her voice curiously strained.

"He climbed the rock on the southern side at the risk of his neck," said Tolentino.

"And what sought he?"

"'Tis what we cannot precisely ascertain," Tolentino admitted. "Nor will he tell us. When captured last night he pretended to be an envoy from Duke Guidobaldo, which plainly he was not. That was but a subterfuge to escape the consequences of his rashness."

And the captain explained, with a pardonable parade of his own shrewdness, how he had at once perceived that had Messer Lorenzo been what he pretended, there would have been no need for him to have come to San Leo thus, in secret.

"Nor need to risk his neck, as you have said, by climbing the southern side, had he been employed by Cesare Borgia," said the lady.

"That is too hasty a conclusion, *madonna*," Tolentino answered. "It is only on the southern side that it is possible to climb the wall; and along the summit itself there is no way round."

"To what end, then, do you conceive that he came?"

"To what end? Why, to what end but to betray the castle into the hands of the Borgia troops?" cried Tolentino, a little out of patience.

"You have proof of that?" she asked him, a rising inflection in her voice.

"To common sense no proof is needed of the obvious," said he sententiously, snorting a little as he spoke, out of his resentment of this feminine interference in men's affairs. "We are about to fling him back the way he came," he ended, with a certain grim finality.

But Madonna Bianca paid little heed to his manner.

"Not until I am satisfied that his intentions were as you say," she replied; and her tone was every whit as firm as his, and was invested with a subtle reminder that she was the mistress paramount of San Leo and he no more than the castellan.

Tolentino glowered and shrugged.

"Oh, as you please, *madonna*. Yet I would make bold to remind you that my ripe experience teaches me best how to deal with such a matter."

The girl looked that war-worn veteran boldly in the eye.

"Knowledge, Sir Captain, is surely of more account than mere experience."

His jaw fell.

"You mean that you—that you have knowledge of why he came?"

"It is possible," said she, and turned from the astonished captain to the still more astonished prisoner.

Daintily she stepped up to Messer Lorenzo, whose deep-sapphire eyes glowed now as they regarded her, reflecting some of the amazement in which he had listened to her words. He had weighed them, seeking to resolve the riddle they contained, and—be it confessed at once—wondering how he might turn the matter to his profit in this present desperate pass.

I FEAR you may discover here something of the villain in Messer Lorenzo. And I admit that he showed himself but little a hero of romance in that his first thought now was how he might turn to account the lady's interest in him. But if it were not exactly heroic, it was undeniably human.

It was not so much his love of her as his love of himself—youth's natural love of life—that now showed him how he might induce her to open a door for his escape from the peril that encompassed him. And yet, lest you should come to think more ill of him than he deserves, you are to remember that he had raised his eyes to her long since, although accounting her far beyond his adventurer's reach.

She looked at him in silence for a moment. Then, with a calm too complete to be other than assumed, she spoke.

"Will you give me your arm to the battlements, Messer Lorenzo?"

A scarlet flush leaped to his cheeks; he stepped forward briskly to her side. Tolentino would still have interposed.

"Consider, *madonna*—" he began.

But she waved him peremptorily aside—and, after all, she was the mistress in San Leo.

Side by side, the prisoner and the lady paramount moved away toward the staircase that led up to the embattled parapet.

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Tolentino growled his impatience, cursed himself for being a woman's lackey, dismissed his men in a rage and sat down by the well in the center of the courtyard to wait the end of that precious interview.

Leaning on the embattled wall, looking out over the vast, sunlit Emilian plain, Madonna Bianca broke at last the long spell of silence that had endured between herself and Castrocaro.

"I have brought you here, Ser Lorenzo," she said, "that you may tell me the true object of your visit to San Leo." Her eyes were averted from his face; her bosom heaved gently; her voice quivered never so slightly.

He cleared his throat to answer her. His resolve was now clear and definite.

"I can tell you what I did not come to do, *madonna*," he answered, and his accents were almost harsh. "I did not come to betray you into the hands of your enemies. Of that I here make oath as I hope for the salvation of my soul."

It may seem perjury at the first glance; yet it was strictly true, if not the whole truth. As we have seen, he had not dreamed that she was in San Leo, or that in delivering up the castle to Della Volpe's men he would be delivering up Madonna Bianca. Had he known of her presence, he would not, it is certain, have accepted the task. Therefore was he able to swear as he had done, and to swear truly, though he suppressed some truth.

"That much I think I knew," she answered gently.

THE words and the tone, if they surprised him, emboldened him in his deceit, urged him along the path to which already he had set his foot. At no other time—considering what he was, and what she—would he have dared so much. But his was now the courage of the desperate. He stood to die, and nothing in life daunts him who is face to face with death. He threw boldly, that he might at the eleventh hour win back the right to live.

"Ah, ask me not why I came!" he implored her hoarsely. "I have dared much, thinking that I dared all. But now—here before you, under the glance of your angel eyes—my courage fails me. I am become a coward who was not afraid when they brought me out to die."

She shivered at his words. This he perceived, and inwardly the villain smiled.

"Look, *madonna!*" He held out his hands, bruised, swollen and gashed. "I am something in this state from head to foot." He turned. "Look yonder!" And he pointed down the sheer face of the cliff. "That way I came last night—in the dark, risking death at every step. You see that ledge—where there is scarce room to stand Along that ledge I crept to yonder wider space, and thence I leaped across that little gulf." She shuddered as she followed his tale. "By that crevice I came upward, tearing knees and elbows, and so until I had gained the platform on the southern side."

"How brave!" she cried.

"How mad!" said he. "I show you this that you may know what courage then was mine, what indomitable impulse drove me hither. You would not think, *madonna*, that, having braved so much, I should falter now, and yet—" He stopped and covered his face with his hands.

She drew nearer, sidling toward him.

"And yet?" said she softly and encouragingly.

"Oh, I dare not!" he cried out. "I was mad—mad!" And then by chance his tongue stumbled upon the very words to suit his case. "Indeed I do not know what was the spirit of madness that possessed me."

He did not know! She trembled from head to foot at that admission. He did not know! But she knew. She knew, and hence the confidence with which she had interposed to brush Tolentino aside. For had he died, had the executioner driven him over that ledge in that horrible death-leap, it would have been her hands that had destroyed him.

For was it not she who had bewitched him. Was it not she who had drugged him with a love-philter—the *elixirium aureum* procured from Messer Corvinus Trismegistus? Did she not know that it was that elixir, burning fiercely and unappeasably in his veins, that had possessed him like a madness and brought him thither, reckless of all danger, so that he might come to her?

The mage had said that he would become her utter slave ere the moon had waned again. What had been the wizard's precise words? She strove to recall them, and

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succeeded: "He will come to you, though the whole world lie between you and him."

Again the confident promise rang in her ears, and here, surely, was its fulfilment. Behold how truly had the mage spoken—how well his golden elixir had done its work!

Thus reasoned Madonna Bianca, clearly and confidently. There were tears in her dark eyes as she turned them now upon the bowed head of the young captain at her side; the corners of her gentle mouth drooped wistfully. She put forth a hot hand and laid it gently upon his fair head, which seemed all turned to gold in the fierce sunlight.

"Poor—poor Lorenzo!" she murmured fondly.

He started round and stared at her, very white.

"Oh, *madonna!*" he cried, and sank upon one knee before her. "You have surprised my secret—my unutterable secret! Ah, let me go! Let them hurl me from the rock, and so end my wretchedness!"

It was supremely well done, the villain knew; and she were no woman but a very harpy did she now permit his death. He was prepared for a pitying gentleness toward an affliction which she must now suppose her own beauty had inspired, and so he had looked for a kindly dismissal. But he was not prepared for any such answer as she made him.

"Dear love, what are you saying? Is there no other happiness for you save that of death? Have I shown anger? Do I show aught but gladness that for me you should have dared so much?"

To Messer Lorenzo it seemed in that moment that something was amiss with the world or else with his poor brain. Was it conceivable that this noble lady should herself have turned eyes of favor upon him? Was it possible that she should return this love of his, which he had deemed of such small account that in his urgent need he had not scrupled to parade it for purposes of deceit where he would not have dared parade it otherwise?

He gave utterance to his amazement.

"Oh, it is impossible!" he cried; and this time there was no acting in his cry.

"What is impossible?" quoth she, and, setting her hands under his elbows, raised him gently from his kneeling posture.

"What is impossible?" she repeated, when they stood face to face once more.

And now the fire in his eyes was not simulated.

"It is impossible that you should not scorn my love," said he.

"Scorn it? I? I who have wakened it—I who have desired it?"

"Desired it?" he echoed, almost in a whisper. "Desired it?"

For a spell they stood so, staring each into the other's eyes; then they fell into each other's arms, she sobbing in her extreme joy, and he upon the verge of doing no less, for, as you will perceive, it had been a very trying morning for him.

And it was thus—the Lady of San Leo and the Borgia captain clasped heart to heart under the summer sky—that Messer Tolentino found them.

Marveling at the long delay, the castellan had thought it well to go after them. And what he now beheld struck him to stone, left him gaping like a foolish image.

They fell apart for very decency, and then the lady, rosily confused, presented Messer Lorenzo to the castellan as her future lord, and explained to him in confidence—and as she understood it—the true reason of that gentleman's visit to San Leo.

That Tolentino profoundly and scornfully discountenanced the whole affair—that he accounted it unpardonable in his mistress, a loyal subject of Duke Guidobaldo's, the holder, indeed, of one of the fortresses of Urbino, to take to husband one whose fortunes followed those of the Borgia usurper—there is no doubt, for Messer Tolentino has left it upon record. And if he did not there and then tell her so, with all that warmth of expression for which he was justly renowned, it was because he was dumfounded by sheer amazement.

THEREAFTER, Messer Lorenzo was cared for as became a man in his position. A bath was prepared for him; fresh garments were found to fit him, the richest and most becoming being selected; the garrison was disappointed of its execution, and the Borgia captain went to dine at *madonna's* table. For this banquet the choicest viands that the besieged commanded were forthcoming, and the rarest wines from Fioravanti's cellar were procured.

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Messer Lorenzo was gay and sprightly, and in the afternoon, basking in the sunshine of Madonna Bianca's smiles, he took up a lute that he discovered in her bower and sang for her one of the atrocious songs that in her honor he had made. It was a dangerous experiment. And the marvel of it is that, despite a pretty taste of her own in lyric composition, Madonna Bianca seemed well pleased.

IN ALL Italy there was no happier man in that hour than Lorenzo Castrocaro, who, from the edge of death, saw himself suddenly thrust up to the highest and best that he could have dared to ask of life. His happiness entirely engrossed his mind a while. All else was forgotten. But suddenly, quite suddenly, remembrance flooded back upon him and left him cold with horror. He had been midway through his second song, *madonna* languishing beside him, when the thought struck him, and he checked abruptly. The lute fell clattering from his grasp, which had suddenly grown nerveless. With a startled cry his mistress leaned over him.

"Enzo! Are you ill?"

He rose precipitately.

"No, no; not ill. But—oh!" He clenched his hands and groaned.

She too had risen, all sweet solicitude, demanding to know what ailed him. He turned to her a face that was blank with despair.

"What have I done? What have I done?" he cried, thereby increasing her alarm.

It crossed her mind that perhaps the effect of the magician's philter was beginning to wane. Fearfully, urgently she insisted upon knowing what might be alarming him; and he, seeing himself forced to explain, paused but an instant to choose a middle course in words, to find expressions that would not betray him.

"Why, it is this!" he cried, and there was real chagrin in his voice as there was in his heart: "In my hot madness to come hither I never paused to count the cost. I am a Borgia captain, and at this moment no better than a traitor, a deserter who has abandoned his trust and his *condotta* to go over to the enemy—to sit here and take my ease in the very castle that my duke is now besieging."

At once she perceived and apprehended the awful position that was his.

"*Gesù!*" she cried. "I had not thought of that."

"When they take me, they will surely hang me for a traitor!" he exclaimed; and indeed he feared it very genuinely, for what else was he become? All night he had left Della Volpe and his men to wait in vain the unbarring of the gate. For having failed there could be no excuse other than death or captivity. That he should not only remain living but that he should later be discovered to have made alliance with Madonna Bianca de' Fioravanti was a matter that could have no issue but one.

"By heaven, it had been a thousand times better had Tolentino made an end of me this morning as he intended!" Then he checked abruptly and turned to her penitently. "Ah, no, no! I meant not that, *madonna!* I spoke without reflecting. I were an ingrate to desire that—an ingrate and a fool! For had they killed me, I had never known this day of happiness."

"Yet what is to be done?" she cried, crushing her hands together in her agony of mind. "What is to be done, my Enzo? To let you now depart would no longer save you. Oh, let me think—let me think!" And then, almost at once, "There is a way!" she cried; and on that cry, which had been one of gladness, she fell suddenly very gloomy and thoughtful.

"What way?" quoth he.

"I fear it is the only way," she said, never so wistfully.

And then he guessed what was in her mind and repudiated the suggestion.

"Ah! Not that!" he protested. "That way we must not think of. I could not let you—not even to save my life."

But on the word she looked up at him, and her dark eye kindled anew with loving enthusiasm.

"To save your life—yes. That is cause enough to justify me. For nothing less would I do it, Enzo, but to save you—you whom I have brought into this pass——"

"What are you saying, sweet?" he cried.

"Why, that the fault is mine, and that I must pay the penalty."

"The fault?"

"Did I not bring you hither?" He flushed, something ill at ease to see—as he supposed—his lie recoiling now upon him.

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"Listen!" she pursued. "You shall do as I bid you. You shall go as my envoy to Cesare Borgia, and you shall offer him the surrender of San Leo in my name, stipulating only for the honors of war and the safe-conduct of my garrison."

"No, no!" he protested still, and honestly, his villainy grown repugnant. "Besides, how shall that serve me?"

"You shall say that you knew a way to win into San Leo and accomplish this—which," she added, smiling wistfully, "is, after all, the truth. The duke will be too well content with the result to quarrel with the means employed."

He averted his face.

"Oh, but it is shameful!" he cried out, and meant not what she supposed him to mean.

"In a few days—in a few weeks, at most—it will become inevitable," she reminded him. "After all, what do I sacrifice? A little pride—no more than that. And shall that weigh against your life with me? Better surrender now, when I have something to gain from surrender, than later, when I shall have all to lose."

He considered. Indeed, it was the only way. And, after all, he was robbing her of nothing that she must not yield in time—of nothing, after all, that it might not be his to restore her very soon, in part at least. Considering this and what the duke had promised him, he gave her the fruit of his considerations, yet hating himself for the fresh deceit he practised.

"Be it so, my Bianca," he said. "But upon terms more generous than you have named. You shall not quit your dwelling here. Let your garrison depart, but you remain."

"How is that possible?" she asked.

"It shall be," he assured her confidently, the promised governorship in his mind.

THAT evening, with letters appointing him her plenipotentiary, he rode out of San Leo alone and made his way down into the valley by the bridle-path. At the foot of this he came upon Della Volpe's pickets, who bore him off to their captain, refusing to believe his statement that he was Lorenzo Castrocaro.

When Della Volpe beheld him, the warrior's single eye expressed at once suspicion and satisfaction.

"Where have you been?" he demanded harshly.

"In San Leo, yonder," answered Castrocaro simply.

Della Volpe swore picturesquely.

"We had accounted you dead. My men have been searching for your body all day at the foot of the rock."

"I deplore your disappointment and their wasted labor," said Lorenzo, smiling.

Della Volpe swore again.

"How came you to fail, and, having failed, how come you out alive?"

"I have not failed," was the answer. "I am riding to the duke with the garrison's terms of capitulation."

Della Volpe very rudely refused to believe him, whereupon Messer Lorenzo thrust under the *condottiero's* single eye Madonna Bianca's letters. At that, the veteran sneered unpleasantly.

"Ha! By the horns of Satan! I see! You ever had a way with the women, Lorenzo. I see!"

"For a one-eyed man you see too much," said Messer Lorenzo, and turned away. "We will speak of this again—when I am wed. Good-night."

It was very late when he reached Urbino. But late as it was—long after midnight—the duke was not abed. Indeed, Cesare Borgia never seemed to sleep. At any hour of the day or night he was to be found by those whose business was of import.

His Highness was working in the library with Agabito, preparing despatches for Rome, when Messer Lorenzo was ushered into his presence.

He looked up as the young captain entered.

"Well," quoth he sharply, "do you bring me news of the capture of San Leo?"

"Not exactly, Highness," replied the *condottiero.* "But I bring you a proposal of surrender and the articles of capitulation. If your Highness will sign them, I shall take possession of San Leo in your name to-morrow."

The duke's fine eyes scanned the confident young face very searchingly. He smiled quietly.

"*You* will take possession?" he said.

"As the governor appointed by your Highness," Messer Lorenzo blandly explained.

He laid his letters before the duke, who

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scanned them with a swift eye, then tossed them to Agabito, that the latter might con them more minutely.

"There is a provision that the Lady Bianca de' Fioravanti is to remain in San Leo," said the secretary, marveling.

"Why that?" quoth Cesare of Messer Lorenzo. "Why, indeed, any conditions?"

"Matters have put on a curious complexion," the *condottiero* expounded. "Things went not so smoothly with me as I had hoped. I will spare your Highness the details; but, in short, I was caught within the castle walls, and—and I had to make the best terms I could under such circumstances."

"You do not, I trust, account them disadvantageous to yourself?" said Cesare. "It would distress me that it should be so. But I cannot think it, for Madonna Bianca is accounted very beautiful."

Castrocaro crimsoned in his sudden and extreme confusion. For once he was entirely out of countenance.

"You are informed of the circumstances, Highness?" was all that he could say.

Cesare's laugh was short and almost contemptuous.

"I am something of a seer," he replied. "I could have foretold this end ere ever you set out. You have done well," he added, "and the governorship is yours. See to it at once, Agabito. Ser Lorenzo will be in haste to return to Madonna Bianca."

A half-hour later, after the bewildered yet happy Castrocaro had departed to ride north again, Cesare rose from his writing-table, yawned, and smiled at the secretary, who had his confidence and affection.

"And so, San Leo, that might have held out for a year, is won," he said, and softly rubbed his hands in satisfaction. "This Castrocaro thinks it is all his own achievement. The lady imagines that it is all her own—by the aid of that charlatan, Trismegistus. Neither dreams that all has fallen out as I had intended, and by my contriving." He made philosophy for the benefit of Messer Agabito: "Who would achieve greatness must learn not only to use men but to use them in such a manner that they never suspect they are being used. Had I not chanced to overhear what I overheard that night at the house of Corvinus Trismegistus, and, knowing what I knew, set the human pieces in this game in motion to yield me this result, matters might have been different indeed, and lives would have been lost ere San Leo threw up its gates. And I have seen to it that the wizard's elixir of love should do precisely as he promised for it. Madonna Bianca, at least, believes in that imposter."

"You had foreseen this, Highness, when you sent Castrocaro on that dangerous errand?" Agabito ventured to inqure.

"What else? Where should I have found me a man for whom the matter was less dangerous? He did not know that Madonna Bianca was there. I had the foresight to keep that matter secret. I sent him, confident that, should he fail to open the gates to Della Volpe and be taken, he was crafty enough not to betray himself, and *madonna* must, of course, assume that it was her love-philter had brought him to her irresistibly. Could she have hanged him, knowing that? Could she have done other than she has done?"

"Indeed, Corvinus has served you well."

"So well that he shall have his life. The precious poison has failed to kill him, and this is the sixteenth day." The duke laughed shortly and thrust his thumbs into the girdle of his robe, which was of cloth of gold reversed with ermine. "Give the order for his release to-morrow, Agabito. But bid them keep me his tongue and his right hand as remembrances. Thus he will never write or speak another lie."

SAN LEO capitulated on the morrow. Tolentino and his men rode out with the honors of war, lance on thigh, the captain very surly at the affair, which he contemptuously admitted passed his understanding.

Into the fortress came then Messer Lorenzo Castrocaro at the head of a troop of his own men, to lay his governorship at the feet of Madonna Bianca.

They were married that very day in the chapel of the fortress, and although it was some years before each made to the other the confession of the deceit which each had practised, the surviving evidence all shows —and to the moralists this may seem deplorable—that they were none the less happy in the mean time.

Another novel by Rafael Sabatini will be published complete in July EVERYBODY'S.

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The Savage Breast

Famine in the North Is Terrible Enough, but When the Darkness Comes, and with It Superstitious Fear of Evil Spirits— A Story with Real Poetic Quality

By Edison Marshall

Illustration by D. C. Hutchison

WINTER, like an old she white bear herself, had taken refuge in a den of hibernation; therefore the spring sun was yellow and bright again over the surging, rumbling, crashing floes of ice. At least, this was the explanation given by Kerallkuk, the medicine-man, and any one who, like Kerallkuk,[1] had seen the sun come back fifty times, who could interpret any dream you would care to tell him, and who, by his own word, could go into a trance and fly straight out of the Singing House clear to the moon, surely ought to know. If in his heart he doubted his own wisdom, he gave no sign of it to the Kutki Island people. And they, simple-hearted children of the ice-fields, would have sooner cut off their own flat noses than to doubt him.

What did it matter, anyway? It was enough for them that the sun had come back. The thing to do with spring is not to wonder whence it had come but to live fully, to eat heartily of the rich frozen blubber and to be merry—for the Great Dark will surely fall again, all too soon.

This did Kerallkuk do. In fact, he overdid it according to strait-laced, civilized standards, and when the Eskimos gathered at their memorable spring festival, he would customarily let Wunchee, his round wife, drop bits of seal blubber into his mouth until he absolutely could not move. Such was Kerallkuk's idea of a real celebration. Tweegock, one of the best hunters in the little tribe, likewise enjoyed himself, and Tweegock's daughter, Coonee, ate so much that her round little stomach was fairly full too. And quite likely, though no man can say for sure, the other natives of the Kutki Island ice celebrated similarly—Nenook, the white bear that hunted seals in the leads, old Awak, the walrus, and the fox and musk-ox on the mainland.

It is a fact that young Nenook, old Nenook's four-year-old son, felt the spring in his blood when, along in the last days of April, he sat snugly at the edge of a mountainous ice-pack and enjoyed the daylight. Being a young bear, lacking his father's strength to stay out late nights, he had just emerged from his den, and now he was growing warm and comfortable. No one could have guessed, four months past, that spring would ever bless these endless fields of ice again; yet here she was, spreading her banners of filmy clouds through the cold blue sky, forming leads between the floes where the sleek heads of the seals now and then appeared above the icy, sparkling water. Nenook found himself wondering mightily about these same seals. His digestive tract was sadly empty, and he must needs feed lightly for a time; yet he felt tingly and excited just at the sight of them.

A very handsome figure was Nenook. The time would come, in old age, when his fur would be yellow like old ivory, but now it was of the whiteness of the drift itself. The basking seal needed a sharp, discerning eye to make out his snowy form stealing over the floes. Besides, ordinarily, Nenook

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made his attack under water, with only the tip of his black nose coming up from time to time for air. Then the sleepy seal would waken to find his escape cut off, with very few seconds thereafter in which to enjoy the sunlight. A seal can squirm along fairly swiftly on the ice, his flappers beating like the wings of a wounded water-bird, but he cannot race with Nenook. The latter, like all bears, looks too awkward to keep his feet at all; he is burly and ungainly, but he can pounce like a panther when occasion arises.

Nenook was half grown, and that meant he weighed better than three hundred pounds and had a pelt which, made into a hearth-rug, would stretch practically six feet. He had the typical polar-bear build—rather longer than his darker cousins to the south, longer neck, more narrow head, high shoulders and big feet for swimming. And at the present instant it appeared likely that he would never live to reach the full growth of maturity.

The air hummed, and something swift and deadly beyond thought pounced at him from the rough ice just beside. And something burned with a sharp pain across the long white bridge of his muzzle.

There is no more tender spot in a bear's anatomy than the region of his nose. Tweegock's arrow, aimed for the vulnerable throat, had not gone quite true; but it surely succeeded in administering the most painful wound that Nenook had ever had the bad luck to receive. It had slicked along the top of his muzzle, taking fur and skin with it, leaving a red track like a brand. And Nenook woke the echoes with his wail of pain.

In reality, that thunderous, doleful bawl did more than any other one thing to preserve his life. The Eskimo nerve is an unstable thing, and even the best of human nerves are likely to become jumpy and uncertain when the ice-crags reecho with a bear's roars of rage and pain. Both Tweegock and his fellow hunter, Kerallkuk, the priest, had been cool enough before, stealthy and sure; but now neither had a true shot left in his bow. Kerallkuk's nerve departed from him, and he shot his copper-tipped shaft without taking aim. And now, still bawling like thunder, Nenook turned, seeking flight.

Tweegock was a trained hunter, and he tried to steady himself for a second shot. The range of his weapon was a hundred yards and he might yet bring down the fleeing bear. But it came about that that deadly missile sought another target. At that instant there came terrible answer to the young bear's cry of distress.

Tweegock had made a disastrous mistake when he thought that Nenook was alone on the ice. The bear was in reality little more than a cub, and in the excitement of hunting the Eskimo had forgot the propensity of polar bears to hibernate in families. Nenook had shared his mother's den through the arctic night just gone; and now the savage old seal-slayer herself came leaping as if from the empty air.

She had been lying in the rough ice within fifty feet of Nenook, her two younger cubs beside her, and the three, through their protective coloration, had entirely escaped the gaze of the two hunters. This was no half-grown four-year-old to lay low with a deer-arrow—she who came leaping across the intervening distance like a white demon to her son's defense. Nenook's bawls of pain and astonishment were completely obliterated by her thunderous roar of rage.

There could be but one answer to that charge. Tweegock was a hunter, tried and true, and he held his harpoon to the last vital instant, but it was like trying to stay the bellowing storm with a bird-dart. His only shadow of hope lay in Kerallkuk; but now this had failed him, too. Kerallkuk, losing faith in his own magic, dropped his weapons and fled.

Thus it was that only the *torno*, the spirits that live in the stones and the sea, beheld the end of Tweegock. Nenook was bounding across the ice in frightened leaps, the wound at his nose leaving a thin red trail behind him, and Kerallkuk's eyes, almost protruding from the heavy face, did not glance back to see the fate of his friend.

By the mercy of Tweegock's gods, the bear struck but once. But the same full stroke by any full-grown polar bear would have struck dead the mightiest musk-ox in the herd.

THERE is one spirit haunting these strange ice-deserts that is particularly well known to the Eskimos.

Only the priest, as a rule, can talk to the *torno*, that dwell in the great boulders and ice-mountains, or with the *keyukut*, that

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often haunt the bodies of beasts; but this one spirit, the most dreadful of all, shadows every igloo in the village. He came and stood that day before little Coonee, Tweegock's daughter. She saw the tall white specter stalking over the ice.

The same spirit had visited Tweegock's igloo some years before, and Coonee's mother had talked with him in the long, mystic arctic night, and he had carried her away with him over the ice. It seemed hardly fair to the dark-eyed girl at the door of the skin tent that he would come twice to the same house in so short a time. Yet Death was a familiar spirit, ever waiting for the people, and there was no real cause to wonder. The Innuit learns, soon or late, to take all things as they come, and this bitter lesson had already gone home to little Coonee waiting in the doorway.

Tweegock would not come again to the village, returning in triumph with the slaughtered caribou—no matter if she waited clear until the Great Dark fell again. She had run to meet him, but she only met Kerallkuk, running to tell his horror-story in the village. Tweegock's spirit had gone afar, he said—perhaps, because he had been a brave hunter, to the blessed land of the Arsissut, possibly to a less-favored hereafter that is laid out above the pale gray-blueness of the arctic sky. The more the priest considered the matter the more likely it seemed that he had gone to the latter place—for Tweegock had certainly offended the ice-gods.

There was little sign in her impassive Oriental face of the blow that had gone so deep into her childish heart. Coonee—which means "kiss" in the Innuit tongue—was but fourteen, nearly a woman in the Eskimo way of thinking, yet, by the greater wisdom of civilized peoples, only a child. She was a dark little creature, her almond-eyes incredibly black; and her broad, childish face, dark with its accumulation of grease, was usually lighted with the far-famed Eskimo smile. But no smile played at her lips to-day; rather, she looked bewildered, unable to believe the bitter truth. And the mercy of tears had not yet come.

As yet she had given little thought to the question of how the tragedy would affect her own life. She knew vaguely that one of the tribe would adopt her, taking care of her until the time was ripe for her marriage to Shug-la-wina, the boy to whom her parents had promised her in infanthood. Yet she knew secretly that her position in the tribe would be less henceforth. Orphan girls are not in great demand among the Innuits. Where the very problem of existence is so hard to solve, the work of securing food and clothes so difficult, an additional mouth is a serious matter indeed to any family. Little Coonee would be given her food and clothes for the next few years because it was the tribe law; but she secretly knew that the tribesmen would have been glad if she, too, had gone with her father beyond the ice.

It was true that in four years more Shug-la-wina, a boy of her own age, was bound to claim her as his bride. Yet there would be no dower to go with her. Her father's early end precluded that. And in this land of too many women a dowerless wife does not often find a ready welcome in her husband's arms.

IN THE mean time, Kerallkuk had led most of the villagers back to the scene of the disaster. It was to be noted that the priest, in spite of the fact that he had no less than seven of the most powerful *keyukut* at his beck and call, stayed close to his fellows as they neared the spot. It might be that the old she bear still lingered about, anxious to try her luck with human hunters again.

The fate of Tweegock was speedily determined. He lay with a broken neck at the edge of the ice; and his slayer, pierced through with a spear and one copper-tipped arrow, lay dead not twenty feet distant. Nenook was nowhere to be seen.

Amarok, father of Shug-la-wina, stopped and examined the spear.

"It is Tweegock's," he announced gravely. "He died fighting."

Such was no mean epitaph, even in this far land. The others nodded gravely. Then one of them picked up Kerallkuk's arrows and spear, lying unmarked with blood on the ice.

The little men, their slanting eyes sober and black, turned quietly to their priest. It was curious that his spear should be lying here, unreddened, when the natural place for it was the body of the dead bear, thrust deep in defense of Tweegock's life. Ordinarily they asked no explanations of their

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priest, but one Innuit does not leave another in the grasp of a wounded bear as long as he is himself armed.

The priest seemed to lack words at first. The truth was that his cunning mind was seeking desperately for an answer to the silent accusation in his people's faces. But slowly the sharp light came back into his narrow, slanting eyes.

"Wait—wait till I may call all the village to the Singing House," he told them mysteriously. "Then ye shall know what befell. Then ye shall not turn such looks into the face of thy priest again."

THAT night, when the silvery arctic dusk came down, the whole village gathered in the Singing House to hear Kerallkuk's story. Even little Coonee had been told to gather with the others. And in the wan light of a single lamp Kerallkuk made the whole matter plain.

"Now ye shall know the truth, ye who went with me to-day, and thou, little Coonee, daughter of him on whom the gods are avenged!"

His people caught their breaths at these words. There was more to it, then, than a mere accident of hunting, death in the fangs of the white bear. Amarok, richest man in the tribe, gasped audibly.

"What art thou saying, Angatkut?" By using Kerallkuk's title he showed himself willing to be convinced.

"The gods are avenged," Kerallkuk said again. "Ye know that Tweegock and I went forth together to hunt the seal. We saw, this side the ice-pack, what seemed at first a white bear—a half-grown bear, easy to slay with arrows. We moved toward it with ready bows, and presently a spirit whispered in my ear."

The others nodded gravely. It was a known fact that Kerallkuk had no less than seven spirits who habitually held conversation with him.

" 'That is not Nenook, the white bear,' the spirit told me. 'He has taken that form only to lead thee to disaster. O Kerallkuk beloved, turn aside quickly and walk with averted face as if thou hadst not seen! That is the great spirit, Kusiunek.' "

No wonder the whole tribe was breathless with excitement now. Of all the wicked deities that hold their sway over the ice-fields there is none, in the folk-lore of this particular tribe, that is half so terrible as Kusiunek. He can not only hound an individual to his destruction but he can lay a whole tribe down with fever, shatter them in their skin boats or destroy them by starvation.

The people did not doubt for an instant but that Kerallkuk told them true. It was wholly reasonable that Kusiunek should take the form of a white bear. And now their childish hearts were choked with fear of what might come next.

"My people, when I heard this I seized Tweegock by the arm and told him what had just been told me," Kerallkuk went on solemnly. "Woe upon him, he did not heed me. 'It is only Nenook,' he told me.

"My people, I could not make him believe. He did not heed my words. He had forgotten that I was Kerallkuk, beloved of seven spirits. I tried to turn him again, but still he hastened on. And I went with him, to save him if I could.

"He shot his arrow, but he might as well have tried to pierce an iceberg as the heart of Kusiunek. With my own eyes I saw the shaft turn in the air, missing the breast, but bringing bright blood to Kusiunek's muzzle. And fire leaped from his eyes as he regarded Tweegock.

"He did not deign to destroy Tweegock himself. He called once, in a voice not greatly different from my own, and one of his servants came to do his will. It was the white bear ye saw lying dead. Tweegock pierced her with his spear, a mortal wound, but it was like the lemming in battle with the fox. My own weapons were torn from my hand as if by a great wind. And when I looked again Tweegock and the white she bear lay dead, and Kusiunek had vanished on the wind."

It made a perfectly plausible story to the Innuits. It not only explained their priest's fallen spears but it was also likely to have an important influence in his future relations with the people. His reputation as a medicine-man was greatly enhanced now he had lived to tell of contact with Kusiunek himself. Kerallkuk had seen some indication of late of the tribesmen falling away from his control, but now there was bound to be a revival of devotion. They would be quick to obey him now, when they saw that death was the answer to disobedience. Better still, the enmity of Kusiunek would explain

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any failures in his own magic in the future.

"Is it thy belief, Angatkut, that Kusiunek will be content with this one life?" Amarok asked, with a curious tremor in his voice.

Kerallkuk waited a long time before he replied.

"I will pray to my spirits to intercede for us," he answered at last. "But ye know Kusiunek. An injury to him must often be repaid by destruction of all the people. Tweegock's spear stained the snow with his bright blood. Tweegock has already paid the price; how many more of us must pay I know not." He suddenly looked, with narrowing eyes, toward little Coonee. "Ye must not forget that his blood is among us still."

The people moved uneasily. It was true. It might be that the whole tribe must suffer because of Tweegock's deed, because Tweegock's child still dwelt among them. Little Coonee, from a mere economic problem, had become a veritable hoodoo.

KERALLKUK made good use of his adventure with Nenook for the two years that followed. Whenever his prophecies went awry, whenever he advised his people as to a good hunting-ground only to have them return to him empty-handed, it was always because Kusiunek, still unavenged, was haunting the tribe. It was Kusiunek that wakened the waves that wrecked the skin boat on the reefs beyond Kutki Island. It was Kusiunek who, riding behind a shattering army of icebergs, drove the people from their spring hunting-ground at the mouth of the Mitirk River. It was the same dread spirit that turned Kataktovick's *kayak* upside down, so that they found him dead in the icy water.

Because Nenook was growing to maturity in the same district that the tribe hunted, there was material in plenty to keep the tradition alive. Now and then one of the hunters caught sight of a fine young white bear that bore a scar, like a brand, across the bridge of his nose, thereupon losing interest in hunting and running all the way back to the shelter of his igloo.

Meanwhile, both Nenook and Coonee were growing up—the former to as magnificent a specimen of polar bear as the ice-gods ever beheld; the latter, except for the curse that was upon her, into as pretty an Innuit maid as ever delighted a whaler's heart. She was rather short, given to plumpness. Her teeth were white between merry lips; her slanting eyes were full of happy lights, and her features and facial lines were soft with friendliness. Her hand had gained considerable deftness since Tweegock's death, and no woman in the tribe could cut and sew a more beautiful parka of fur. And she was happy, too.

This was not because the people had forgotten that, through her father's offense against Kusiunek, she was the direct cause of all the bad luck that had come upon them. But she came of a breed that knew how to make the best of a bad situation. Maybe Kusiunek would forgive her soon, and then she would come into her own again. Shug-la-wina, to whom she was betrothed, would not seem so frightened and uneasy when he talked to her. The tribesmen would not act so strange and discomfited when she gathered with them in the Singing House.

The truth was—and she knew it very well—that Shug-la-wina would give a whole skin boat full of deer-hides if he could get out of the contract that his parents had made with Coonee's parents years agone. Bad luck dogs a man's steps continuously enough without marrying all the bad luck in the tribe. Coonee was pretty, and a warm heart beat under her jacket of fur, and her eyes, when not laughing, were sober and wistful in a way to make a man's heart leap; yet she was the daughter of Tweegock, who had scratched Kusiunek's nose with an arrow!

Shug-la-wina was perfectly sincere with himself about the whole thing. Under ordinary circumstances Coonee would make him the best possible little wife, but who wanted to ally himself with one who is hated by the gods? Love is one thing, a very important thing, even on these windy fields of ice, but a life of persecution by Kusiunek is quite another. Shug-la-wina looked with no pleasure on a marriage that would bring him under the curse of the evil one. It was really a tragic situation for little Coonee.

The thing seemed perfectly reasonable to her. She was Tweegock's daughter—as long as she remained in the tribe the evil Kusiunek would never cease his persecutions. Had not the priest said that she was flesh of Tweegock's flesh, blood of his blood? Nor did it seem inconsistent with Kusiunek's character that he should take out his

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vengeance on the whole tribe instead of wiping her directly out of the way with one blow. The love of one's own people is deep and true among the Innuits; the very rigor of their lives develops a strong tribal consciousness, and it was a heart-breaking thing to be the cause of all their misfortune. No wonder her thought sometimes took a dangerous turn!

ORPHAN girls are only a burden to the tribe, to begin with. And when one is not only a burden but a curse as well, it causes queer, creepy fancies to be born in the mind. Little Coonee, with her child's heart, could hardly give them admittance at first. Then there were long hours when she would lie awake in her robes, breathless and dry-eyed, letting them turn over and over in her brain. Old women, grandmothers of the people, often climbed to the high crags and leaped off into the Arsissut when they had become a burden to the tribe. And the thing that made the situation particularly fraught with danger was that little Coonee was a child of an Oriental race that has followed the arctic sea round from their forgotten homes in Asia. Like all her people, she was at heart a fatalist. The plan that came so dimly to her now was wholly in keeping with an Oriental code of life.

The third autumn after Tweegock's death was one of signal misfortune for her tribe. The seal-catch, to begin with, was tragically light. The schools of fish had swum far from their accustomed haunts this year, and the seal had followed them away. But Kerallkuk explained the situation by the hatred of an angry god—a myth that he had told so often that he was beginning to believe it himself.

The women worked early and late with the darts and snares in pursuit of the sea-birds on the cliffs; but the skin sacks seemed to fill so slowly. It did not even seem to help matters to have little Coonee remain in her igloo instead of going with the women to the cliffs. Indeed, the catch seemed noticeably smaller than ever, but it was not to be thought of that the explanation might be found in the simple fact that Coonee was the most deft and skillful bird-snarer in the tribe. Kerallkuk whispered to Wunchee, and Wunchee managed to whisper it all over the encampment, that the great evil spirit, Kusiunek, was leading the birds away from the snares.

There was the beginning of real panic in the tribe when the salmon-catch failed too. The Eskimos gathered as usual at the bank of the Mitirk River; but the silver armies failed to come. Only a few of the great fish were taken in the nets; and this was real disaster. The Innuits depend upon the salmon for one of their greatest sources of winter food.

The shortage was general, not confined to their own village, but there was plenty of talk back and forth through the skin tents and in the Singing House, and no one took the further trouble to converse in whispers. The truth was all too plain. Had not Amarok seen a white bear standing in the shallow water just below the place where he had stretched his net?

The Eskimo has a lively imagination, and by the time Amarok had told his story six times over it would have done credit to Kerallkuk himself. It grew steadily better with repetition. On first telling, Amarok had seen the bear from far off; on the sixth, he had been close enough to see a black scar across its white muzzle and hear what it said to the salmon. "Turn back into the sea," the bear distinctly said to the silver fish. It was Kusiunek, of course, still haunting the village folk in the form of a white bear. "This wound I carry was given me by the father of one who still dwells in the village. Turn back and thus avoid their nets, O my servants!"

It was entirely logical. And his story was borne out strikingly by the turn of events the day the hunters waited at the ford for the caribou herd, the destruction of which was their last chance to procure winter food.

No wonder, since the seal- and salmon-catch had failed, every hunter in Coonee's tribe gathered above the ford on the Mitirk River when they saw the herd approaching from afar. The plan of the hunt was astonishingly simple. They would wait round the bend and above the ford, and when hundreds of animals had entered the water, shoot down the riffles to them in their *kayaks*, ply among them, thrusting swiftly with their spears, and with fair luck they could slaughter a hundred of the heavy beasts before the herd could escape.

It was a real crisis in the history of this little band of Eskimos. There were no other

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All at once they discerned the form of a great white bear. Kusiunek was waiting. Already the girl was drawing nigh to his secret places.

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tribes to whom they could appeal for help. The failure of the hunt meant famine—and famine might easily mean death for all but the strongest and hardiest of the tribe.

The men quivered in their *kayaks*, braced with their paddles. When the animals were in the water, Amarok would signal; swiftly the little crafts would dart down the rapids among them. Swift and sure would be their spears, red the waters when the hunt was done. Even now the herd was drawing close; they could make out the snowy manes, the spreading, many-tined antlers of their leader. Now they were skirting a snowy butte hardly three hundred yards away.

But there was one other hunter waiting for this herd of which the tribesmen were totally unaware. Because his fur was white, he lay perfectly concealed in an irregularity in the snowy hillside, just beside the narrow valley through which the herd must pass. The wind blew his scent away; he made not the slightest motion that might betray his outline to the watchful eyes of the old herd-leader. Eager though the Inniuits were, they had no conception of the blood-lust—the wild, exquisite hunting-madness that flamed through the veins of this great polar bear. They were merely men, and he was the monarch of the wild.

This was his destiny—the silent wait in ambush for the caribou herd. His great size, ten feet from tip to tip, the agility and power and the hunting-craft developed to a superlative degree all combined to make him the savage deer-slayer that he was. He had come honestly by his prowess. For three years, since that memorable spring day on the ice-pack, Nenook had lived the life ordained by the great Manitou for the polar bears. He had loved it all—the long voyages on a drifting ice-floe through the arctic waters, the swimming, endless hours on delectable journeys of exploration among the crags that outcropped in the straits, the rough games with his companions, the ecstasy of hunting, the drowsy hours of sunlight, his back against an iceberg in the long summer days. But not once in all those three years had his powerful body been the lodge of the evil Kusiunek, or of any other spirit, for that matter. He was blissfully unconscious of the things old Kerallkuk was saying about him. He was a big, healthy, full-grown polar bear, and that, considering the joys of living, was all he cared about being. He had long acquaintance with the salmon that came up Mitirk River—they had been of the keenest interest to him as long as he could remember—but his associations with them were not at all as had been reported. He now and then scooped them out with a whizzing blow of his paw, but it was never for purposes of conversation. And he was still playing his own game in his own way as he waited for the caribou in the valley.

They drew slowly up to his ambush. He leaped like white water down a fall. And the old caribou bull died swiftly by one lightning stroke of his great white fore paw.

It did not particularly disturb him that his sudden appearance had set the whole herd in panic, and now they were racing away up the valley, into the wide tundra from which they would never retrace their steps. But the hunters, waiting in their *kayaks*, beheld the sight with sinking hearts and with a creepy terror that began at their toes and came out through the erect hair of their scalps. The caribou-hunt had missed fire. And their protruding eyes identified the creature that had wrecked their plans.

"It is Kusiunek!" the priest exclaimed, gasping—fully believing himself in the myth he had built up. For they could see plainly the black scar of an arrow-wound across the bear's white muzzle.

THE sun's stay in the sky was ever more brief. It flashed just an hour or two along the far southern horizon; then it was gone. The green ice locked down upon the sea, and the rivers were stricken dead in their beds. The cold rain changed to snow that never ceased falling until the entire arctic world, as far as the tired eyes could reach or the mind conceive, was an unbroken waste of white. The snow changed to ice-dust that blew along in a thousand flurries over those still and lifeless seas. Then the sun flashed once more at the horizon and failed to rise again. The Great Dark had fallen.

With the darkness came the bitter, blasting cold, cruel as the fangs of a wolf. It stole through the warm garments of fur, under the robes where little Coonee slept, through the thick walls of the igloos. All except the oldest and strongest of the white bears—those who knew every wile of hunting—were driven against their will into

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hibernation. Such other living things as were left abroad the snow were only the small white foxes that yapped in the darkness, like the ghosts of the dead, and the white wolves that slipped like evil spirits over the moonlit snow.

The northern lights played in almost ceaseless glory in the pale sky. A frozen moon looked down over a frozen world. Kerallkuk's eyes were no longer sharp and cunning when he spoke of spirits. He knew of a magic greater than his own. Spirits were abroad in that strange, grim grayness outside his igloo more terrible than any to whom he had chanted in the Singing House.

Sometimes, when the ball-players that made the northern lights were resting in the sky, and when the moon's face was hidden, the night that pressed upon the village was black beyond any reach of thought. At such times cold horror gripped the heart, and the marrow froze in the bones at the yapping cry of a fox outside the igloo. Then there were nights, vaguely dim, when the stars emerged in countless multitudes, icy bright, remote, watching with eternal indifference the grim, pathetic battle that was waged below. Sometimes the storms swept in from the sea—stinging clouds of ice-dust borne through the night, bellowing winds in which the voices of a thousand malignant spirits were mingled in awful harmony. But mostly there was only the grayness—the eternal monotone of the deep twilight on the snow.

It was even worse than the smothering darkness. It was so wan, so cold, so unutterably dreadful! Hour after hour, week upon week, with only a measured deepening and paling alternately of the twilight that lay over the world. One man could see another's face dimly, yet plain enough to behold the glitter of incipient madness in his slanting eyes. Nothing was distinct; nothing was clear-cut. The very familiar sea was lost in unutterable strangeness. In such a time did the Kotki Island people come face to face with famine.

Famine could be endured—with that cold fatalism with which the Innuits, till they die, endure all misfortune—but it was the darkness that came with it that broke their hearts and their spirits. It was unspeakably terrible to meet famine in the darkness. The superstition that hounded them might have been grimly humorous before, but it was stark tragedy now. It is not bad to die, for death calls all the people in the end, but it is tragic to live under the scourge of fear. Already the lamps burned low and dim from the shortage of the precious seal-oil. The last of their little stores of food were gone from the igloos. A few days more, and the lights would burn down and out, and the lives of all except the strongest tribesmen would burn out too. Kusiunek's vengeance was complete.

BUT now the thoughts that had come at first so dimly into little Coonee's mind had taken definite form. It was not right that the tribe should perish because of her. Perhaps even now the dread spirit that hated her might be propitiated and the curse of famine removed. So it came about that, in one strange, soundless hour, little Coonee knew the strength of a great resolve.

No human being saw her leave the igloo and, like a ghost itself, steal through the shadows to the Singing House. Mostly the people lay in their igloos, watching the lamps burn down to darkness. Nor did the priest hear the song she sung—a queer rising and falling song in a wonderfully sweet, earnest voice—a chant that was the Innuit's prayer for atonement. Her black eyes were glistening with tears as she stood silent at last with lifted arms. She was only a child still—the darkness was terrible to face alone.

But not one instant did she weaken.

"I come, Kusiunek!" she said, trying hard to speak steadily and strong. "I will go to thee, and thou shalt have my soul in payment for what my father did to thee. Then thou wilt not wreak vengeance further on the people. Then thou wilt save them—thou wilt bring them the seal and the caribou—and break the famine. Kusiunek, for them I come to you, into thine own shadows!"

Little Coonee paused, shivering with terror. She wondered if Kusiunek would wait for her to come to him in the shadows, or whether he would reach into the Singing House, now that she had given herself, and take her now. Then the people would find only her lifeless form on the skin floor of the temple.

But there was no answer from the night. She turned, stealing once more into the pale gloom without.

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Impelled by a woman's instinct she could not suppress, she made her way to the igloo where Shug-la-wina lived with his parents. The youth was lying on a bed of skins, and his interest quickened when he saw in the lamplight the dazed look on the girl's white face. She swiftly and quietly made her way to him, and knelt for a moment at his side.

"Shug-la-wina, I go to Kusiunek," she told him simply.

He nodded slowly, his own face turning white. He had already guessed the girl's intention. It was the fitting thing for the hated of the gods to do. Yet his hand shook, and he could not hold it still.

"Thou knowest—where to find Kusiunek?" the boy asked slowly.

"Straight north he has his igloo. Thou knowest the hunters have glimpsed him many times in past days—taking the form of the white bear with the wounded muzzle. Less than an hour's walk—straight north. And then Kusiunek will bring food to the tribe and harass them no more."

It was true that the white bear with the scarred muzzle had been seen several times of late, always in the region of the low hills that stood beside the sea, just to the north. It was Kusiunek, of course, and it was wholly reasonable that he had his igloo on the beach, back of those snowy hills. Of course, the hunters did not care to go near and determine its exact location. They had no wish to attract the attention of the evil god. And if they needed further proof of the creature's identity, they found it in the fact that the bear had remained for days in practically this same spot, instead of wandering the hundred inlets in a single night after the manner of bears. Unquestionably little Coonee had only to walk straight north, and sooner or later she would encounter Kusiunek.

Shug-la-wina shivered.

"Thou—thou wilt not return?" he asked.

There was a certain amount of anxiety behind the question. It is not good to behold again one who has gone to an evil god. Even when common death takes any of the people, the Innuits have little wish to have them return. It is enough that they should sometimes cry softly in the darkness outside the igloo. Shug-la-wina remembered that he was betrothed to Coonee, and if she *did* return, after her dread surrender to Kusiunek, likely she would visit this very igloo. The thought was ice on the youth's heart.

"Nay," the girl answered quietly. "Thou wilt not see thy betrothed again."

It was true. In spite of the nameless terror that devoured her heart, it was her firm intention to walk straight north, never to return to the beloved huts of snow. Kusiunek himself would destroy her, or else, as in Tweegock's case, some one of his agents—a wild beast or perhaps merely cold and hunger—would do his work for him. It was farewell between these two.

"Thou wilt save the people," Shug-la-wina told her, trying in vain to hold his voice steady. He looked into her glistening, dark eyes. "The loss is mine. We were betrothed."

"Yes—beloved!" All at once bright tears rolled down the girl's cheeks. "Wilt thou make wide thy arms, Shug-la-wina? Wilt thou let me lie close to thy breast—for the sake of what was to have been mine? Only for one breath——"

The boy moved to make room for her beside him, and for a long, dreamlike moment they lay breast to breast, these two guileless children of the ice-fields, forgetting for a moment the tragic superstitions the price of which was to be little Coonee's life. The brown cheeks pressed close, and then the girl, dry-eyed, got to her feet. The youth stood beside her.

"*Amna-ah-ya*," he pronounced slowly, quietly, in measured syllables, invoking the Eskimo gods in her behalf. "*Amna-amna-ah-ya.*"

The girl smiled dimly, then, bending, removed from her boots her white bird-skin gloves and slipped them on her brown hands, showing in an instant that her forthcoming deed was of religious significance. Then she crept through the long snow passage, a small figure crushed with the black horror of the invisible, and her steps were soft on the snow as she headed straight north toward a fate she dared not guess.

WALKING at a respectful distance, the entire tribe, led by Shug-la-wina, followed the white-faced girl onto the ice-fields. They had no wish to come too close or to go too far; but if the girl were to vanish in a column of flame or in any other spectacular way, they wished to be on hand to behold it. For the first mile or two,

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however, nothing of the least excitement came to pass.

They could really see quite plainly into the wan grayness of the night. The moon was out, and the snow, like a great white mirror, accentuated what light there was. Besides, the northern lights had just resumed their wan, mysterious display in the far reaches of the sky. They could make out the girl's form plainly enough at the edge of the deeper shadow, pushing bravely on into the haunted dusk. And all at once a deep, troubled gasp passed from mouth to mouth as they discerned, a quarter of a mile farther on, the form of a great white bear.

It was true. Kusiunek was waiting. Already the girl was drawing nigh to his secret places, the ice-bound beach just beyond a low range of snowy hills. Among the grotesque ice-forms she would find his igloo, never to return to them again.

Now they saw with amazement that the bear had turned and was hastening away as if in flight. But their faithful priest had a perfectly satisfactory explanation for Kusiunek's unexpected conduct .

"He is leading her to his igloo," Kerallkuk told his people. "See! She follows him."

Yes; they could see plainly that the girl trudged on in the great creature's trail; but they could not watch her for long. The bear was on the low hills when they first saw him, and presently he vanished on the opposite side. In an instant more the girl had passed the crest of the hill and had likewise disappeared. Whatever grim fate would be hers would evidently come to pass on the ice-locked shore beyond the hills.

"She is gone," Kerallkuk said in a sepulchral voice. "We shall never see her again."

"Thou wilt not have us follow farther?" Shug-la-wina asked in a queer, breathless voice.

Kerallkuk hesitated. Surely the sensible course was to return to their igloos and leave little Coonee to her fate. Yet in his heart he had a great deal of curiosity as to what form this fate would take; and surely there was safety in numbers. They might push on to the top of the hills, at least. Surely Kusiunek would be content with the human sacrifice; and if the spectators did not push too close——

"Perhaps—a little farther," the priest returned. "When I am here, no harm can befall. Lead on, Shug-la-wina."

For it was just as well to have some one else walk in front, in case of accidents. And now the entire little tribe was pushing up the low range behind which little Coonee had just vanished.

NOT one of them could tell what he expected to see when he gained the crest. Certainly it would be something horrible. Their eyes shone with excitement as they mounted higher; their brown faces were pale as far as paleness was possible to such complexions, and sometimes they paused uncertainly in scattered groups. And in the faint, flickering gleam of the northern lights, it was a scene never to forget.

"We may find her lying still, just as we found Tweegock," the priest told them, feeling it was just as well to make as many prophecies as possible. "Perhaps Kusiunek will have already devoured her, or carried her to his great white igloo——"

But at that instant the priest's words died on his lips. There came a most astounding interruption.

Little Coonee herself, running like a deer, suddenly appeared just above them on the crest of the hill. The first thought that flashed through the tribesmen's minds was that she was fleeing, and probably Kusiunek himself was in pursuit; and they all but broke and fled themselves in wild and frenzied panic. The only thing that saved them was the sound that little Coonee made. It was the merriest, most joyful peal of laughter that any of them had ever heard.

"The girl has the madness!" Kerallkuk managed to say, bent on horror to the last. But, some way, the happy laugh that rang down to them did not sound like the cry of one who is suddenly demented. Besides a wondrous elation, Shug-la-wina felt a curious tide of embarrassment surging through him; and the blood mounted so hot and bright in his cheeks that it showed through some years' accumulation of grease.

"I have the madness, have I?" little Coonee answered saucily, in a way that no Innuit should ever address the priest. She had heard Kerallkuk's words, and she only laughed the merrier. For an instant she danced among her people in mad glee; and then, seizing Shug-la-wina by the hand, raced with him to the top of the ridge.

It was the hand of a living girl, not a ghost—Shug-la-wina could determine that

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fact through the bird-skin glove. Evidently no great harm had befallen her on the shore beyond. So he ran cheerfully beside her, and in a moment had gained the crest. And no wonder she had come dancing back in happiness!

Still running as fast as his four white legs could carry him, the great form of the white bear was already growing dim in the distant shadows. There could be no further doubt that the animal was running away! Nenook was a valiant hunter. He had slain the musk-oxen and caribou, but he did not care to come to grips with the tall form that had deliberately chased him over the snow. Like all sensible bears, Nenook had a healthy respect for human beings. Every since the arrow had scraped off the skin of his nose, he had made it a point to keep well out of the way of his fur-clad neighbors, and he had made no exception of little Coonee, bent on yielding her brave, cheerful life for the good of her people.

The sacrifice, Shug-la-wina saw, had not come to pass. And in the same glance he saw the curse that had been upon the tribe was broken at last.

Stretched out a full seventy feet on the shore lay a vast, towering form—nothing more or less than the frozen body of a great whale cast upon the beach just before the last great freeze. No wonder Nenook had been seen so often on the snowy hills behind—no wonder he had lingered here instead of roaming far and wide after the usual custom of his breed. A great tear at one side showed where the white glutton had been eating his fill day after day for the past weeks. But one hundred tons of rich flesh and blubber remained—enough to sustain the whole tribe and to keep bright every lamp in the village clear until the spring brought the seal again.

LATER that night Amarok gave a great feast in honor of the savior of the tribe. Amarok felt it was his right, much more than the right of little Coonee's foster-parents—for in a short time more the girl was coming to his own igloo to live as his son's wife. It was a known fact that he had not been so proud and glad a few hours before that Shug-la-wina and little Coonee were engaged. But now he seemed to feel that special honor was due him on account of it.

The lamps burned bright with whale-oil—as soft and warm a light as ever shone in any home in any land. Every stomach was packed with whale-meat until it could receive no more. Even old Kerallkuk, who had acted rather disgruntled at first and had felt that he was discredited for good and all, fell to with good cheer and devoured boiled whale-meat until he could no longer stand erect.

Thereafter, lying flat on his back, he made a very creditable little speech. It was better, he considered, to fly with the wind than let it beat him down.

"I was right, after all," he said in the stillness. "The great and evil Kusiunek walked in the body of the bear."

His full-fed people opened sleepy eyes and gazed at him.

"Then why—" Shug-la-wina began.

"Wait, thou favored youth! It was Kusiunek we saw to-day, not merely Nenook, the bear. Why, ye ask me, did he then flee from Coonee, leaving his meat to us? My people, it was because Coonee also is blessed with powerful spirits." At the questioning grunts he heard on all sides he waved his fat hands. "I know it is not often that women are blessed with *keyukut*. When they are, they are thrice blessed. My people, she will grow to be great, to command the spirits of the air and the sea and the ice—even greater than I, Kerallkuk. Already my own spirits have told me of her might. Even Kusiunek could not conquer her; but to win her favor he led her to his own meat. My people, she is beloved of the gods!"

After all, it was quite a reasonable explanation. The tribesmen were perfectly willing to accept it. They nodded sleepily, gasping somewhat from the lack of air in the room. It was good to be full-fed, to see the lamps burning bright, and old Kerallkuk was quite a satisfactory priest. And little Coonee was particularly delighted. The dower she would bring her husband was greater than a boat-load of such riches as implements and skins—nothing less than a command over the spirits of the sea and the ice and the air. Kerallkuk said so himself.

As she drifted off into slumber she was vaguely and deliciously aware that, somehow, Shug-la-wina had crept close and had lifted her sleepy head upon his shoulder.

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Stirring Adventures in a Search for Treasure Which Leads to the Orient

The Bucoleon Treasure

Beginning with a Strange Murder in New York, Then Queer Complications in England, Followed by Thrilling Encounters with as Crafty and Murderous a Set of Asiatic Villains as Ever Were Imagined

By Arthur D. Howden Smith

Illustrations by Ralph Pallen Coleman

THE messenger was peering at the card above the push-button beside the apartment entrance as I came up the stairs.

"Chesby?" he said laconically, extending a pink envelope.

"He lives here," I answered. "I'll sign for it."

The boy clumped off down-stairs, and I let myself in, never dreaming that I held the key to destiny in my hand—or, rather, in the pink envelope.

A samovar was bubbling in the studio, and my cousin, Betty King, hailed me from the couch on which she sat between her father and Hugh.

"Here you are at last!" she cried. "Dad and I have come to say good-by to you."

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Can't you stand Hugh any longer?"

Hugh glowered at me.

"Always ragging," he commented.

Betty laughed.

"We're going to Constantinople to hunt for Greek manuscripts."

"I have a theory," explained my uncle, Vernon King, "that the upheavals of the war and the occupation of the city by Christian garrisons should be productive of rich opportunities for bibliophiles like myself."

"Well, I wish you luck," I grumbled. "And I wish I was not tied down to an architect's drawing-board."

"Matter of fact, I'm about fed up with Wall Street," growled Hugh. "Nobody can make money any more."

"It's very funny," remarked Betty. "Both you and Jack announced, when you settled down after the war, Hugh, that nothing could ever root you up again. All you wanted, you said, was a good job and plenty of hard work."

"I know it," admitted Hugh. "I remember Nash, here, and Nikka Zaranko——"

"You mean the famous Gipsy violinist?" interrupted my uncle, who employs the millions that flow in from his oil-holdings to patronize the arts and sciences.

"Yes, sir. He was in the Foreign Legion during the war. We all met in the last big push in Flanders. I went in with my battalion to help out Jack's crowd, and was snowed under with them. Then Nikka tried to extricate both outfits, and the upshot was the Aussies finally turned the trick. Some show!

"Well, we three became pals. What I

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was going to say was that the last time we got together before demobilization we agreed we never wanted to feel the threat of danger again. We wanted to become rich and prosperous and fat and contented. That was why I came over to New York with Jack, instead of staying home and fighting with my uncle."

"That reminds me," I said, extending the pink envelope. "Here's a cable for you."

"If it's from Uncle James, I shall be surprised," replied Hugh, ripping open the envelope. "A line once in six months is his idea of avuncular correspondence. Hello!" He pursed his lips in a prolonged whistle.

"Anything wrong?" asked Betty anxiously.

"No—well—humph! It's hard to say. Listen to this:

"Sailing *Aquitania* to-day. Due New York eighteenth. Must see you immediately. Have made important discovery. Your aid essential. Family fortunes involved. This confidential.

CHESBY.

"Yes; on second thoughts it is wrong—all wrong. He's after that treasure again! Oh, damn! I did my best to persuade him to be sensible before I left England."

"A treasure!" exclaimed Betty. "But you never told *me* about it!"

"It's a long story," protested Hugh. "Frightfully boring. It's a sort of family curse—like leprosy or housemaid's knee. It's supposed to be located in Constantinople, and my uncle has spent his life and most of the family's property trying to find it. That's why I have to make money in New York instead of playing the country gentleman. There was little enough in the family treasury before Uncle James reached it. Now— Well, the next lord, who will probably be me, will find trouble paying the herald's fees, let alone succession duties."

"You really are too exasperating!" declared Betty. "A treasure story is never boring."

"I am on Betty's side," said her father.

MY UNCLE, Vernon King, is a very decent sort, despite the fact that he is a millionaire. He is a professor several times over, and hates the title. And he is one of the few learned men I know who can be interested in lowbrow diversions.

"So am I," I said, backing him up. "You have been guilty of secrecy with your friends, which is an English vice I thought I had broken you of, Hugh. Come clean!"

"But there's so little to tell," he said. "I had an ancestor about seven hundred years ago who is generally called 'Hugh the First.' This Hugh was son to Lord James, who went to the Crusades and was a famous character in his time. On his way to Palestine, the stories say, James stayed a while with the Emperor Andronicus, who ruled in the Eastern empire——"

"Ah, yes," interrupted King eagerly. "Would that have been Andronicus Comnenus, sometimes called 'The Butcher'?"

"I believe so, sir."

"Very interesting," nodded King. "Andronicus amassed a great wealth through fines and exactions from the nobles, so the contemporary chronicles tell us."

"And this treasure is supposed to be in Constantinople!" exploded Betty. "Where we are going! Isn't that so, Hugh?"

"Yes; it is always located in Constantinople," answered Hugh. "In fact, it is generally refered to as the 'Treasure of the Bucoleon,' which, I understand from Uncle James, was the principal palace of the Eastern emperors."

"Quite right," agreed Vernon King, his scholar's interest whipped aflame. "It was a magnificent residence, vying with the Palace of the Cæsars in Rome. In reality, in light of modern antiquarian research, we may describe it as a group of noble structures standing isolated from the city within a spacious park, surrounded by an independent series of fortifications and with its own naval harbor on the Bosporus."

"An extensive area to hunt over for an apocryphal treasure," remarked Hugh.

"You may well say so," endorsed my uncle. "I have been in Constantinople for extended periods upon several occasions, and I have never satisfied myself as to the existence at this time of any bona-fide portions of the Bucoleon, although it is difficult to pronounce definitely on this point. The older portions of the city, especially those most massively constructed, have been so overbuilt since the Turkish conquest that frequently what is ostensibly a relatively modern building turns out to be almost unbelieveably ancient at the core. But the prejudices of the Turks and——"

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Betty, chewing her finger with impatience, waved to her father to be silent.

"Daddy!" she exclaimed. "Really, you aren't lecturing you know. Do let Hugh get on with the treasure."

"But I'm afraid I've gotten as far as I can," replied Hugh. "The tradition simply says that Andronicus confided the secret of the location of the treasure to Lord James. Then Andronicus was assassinated and James was thrown into prison by his successor. Hugh, James' son, went to Constantinople with an army of Latin Crusaders who had decided that the best way to help the Holy Land was to establish a friendly base there. They conquered the city——"

"A remarkable venture," corroborated my uncle. "The ease with which they secured possession of a city of one million inhabitants, not to speak of an extensive empire, is a clear indication of the degeneracy——"

Betty clapped her hand over his mouth.

"Do get on, Hugh!" she begged. "The treasure! You're as long-winded as dad."

WE ALL laughed, and yet, indefinably, she had communicated to each of us something of the magic spell which is conveyed by any hint of treasure hidden in the past. We savored the heady wine of danger. When Hugh continued his story, we all leaned forward, flushed and tense.

"The Crusaders captured the city, and Hugh rescued his father. Then they returned to England. Before James died he passed on the secret of the treasure to Hugh. There are documents in the charter-chest——"

"What's that?" demanded Betty.

"Its a terribly old oaken box, bound with copper and steel," explained Hugh. "We keep it in a safe-deposit vault in the City—London, you know. These documents say that James' idea was to have the treasure used for the rehabilitation of Christendom if any cause arose which would justify such a gift. Failing that, the money was to go to his descendants. But for many generations the lords of Chesby were too busy to hunt treasure so far from home.

"One lord tried for it in Harry the Fifth's time, but the Greeks watched him so closely that he thought himself lucky to escape from Constantinople with his life. Then the Turks captured the city, and after that it was too risky—except for one chap in Elizabeth's reign. He was Lord Hugh, the sixteenth baron, a shipmate of Raleigh and Drake and Hawkins, and he feared nothing that lived. He put in at Constantinople and bearded the Grand Turk in his lair. But even he did not venture to make a genuine search in view of the conditions that prevailed. From his time on few of the family bothered with the tradition until Uncle James commenced to mortgage farms to finance his researches."

"Then you have no definite knowledge of the location of the treasure?" asked King.

Hugh laughed bitterly.

"No, sir. That is just why I feel so peevish over the way Uncle James has devasted the estate. It's a search for a needle in a haystack—and a needle that in all probability never existed, at that."

"I fear so," assented King, shaking his head.

"Nonsense!" said Betty. "It's as good a treasure story as I ever read of. Why shouldn't it be true? Could you imagine a more perfect place for concealing a treasure all these centuries than Constantinople?"

"Your father will tell you," retorted Hugh scornfully, "that there is not a famous ruin in the Near East but is declared to contain a treasure of one kind of another."

"True—only too true!" agreed King.

"The sole use of the legend so far," continued Hugh unhappily, "has been to give Uncle James something to do. It must be a godsend to Curzon in managing the House, for, during the war, while Uncle James was shut up in England, he was continually moving for the appointment of committees to preserve the monumental brasses of country churches and appealing to the government to recognize that England owed a duty to civilization in retaining and christianizing Constantinople—so he could dig to his heart's content for the treasure."

"Well, I, for one, intend to believe in it," stated Betty, "and if your uncle wants any help in hunting for it, he can count on me."

"We'll all help him, if it comes to that," I said. "Nikka Zaranko would never forgive us if we left him out of such a party."

"Uncle James will have nothing tangible to go on," warned Hugh. "He's never had a sane idea yet."

"I take it, then," remarked Betty, rising,

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with a detached air, "that you have no desire to go to Constantinople."

Betty is slim, with brown hair and eyes and a face that you have to look at, and when she sets her head back— But, of course, I am only her cousin. Hugh jumped up, crunching the cable in his hand.

"If I only do get a decent excuse to go to Constantinople!" he exclaimed. "But there's no use. I won't, Bet. I couldn't honestly encourage Uncle James in any more foolishness."

"Perhaps," suggested King, "his visit has nothing to do with the treasure."

Hugh chuckled, his merry self again.

"Cross the Atlantic just to look me up? Not a chance, sir. His ruling passion is driving him on. Confound it, though, I wish this hadn't come up. And I wish I didn't crave adventure again. And I wish you weren't going to Constantinople. All right—laugh, Jack, curse you! Laugh! Here—I'll scrag you with a couch-pillow!"

"Easy! Easy!" I pleaded. "For the furniture's sake. How about giving the Kings a line to Nikka in Paris?"

"Thanks!" said Betty. "But we're going via the Mediterranean. The best thing for you boys to do is to pack up with Hugh's uncle, collect your friend Nikka *en route* and follow on."

"No go," answered Hugh dismally. "All I am scheduled for is a fat family row."

THE steamship company telephoned while Hugh and I were at breakfast to say that the *Aquitania* was just docking. When we reached the pier, West Street was swarming with outgoing automobiles loaded with the first contingents of debarking passengers. We pushed our way up-stairs into the landing-shed, surrendered our passes and dived into the swirling vortex of hurried travelers, hysterical relatives and impassive customs officials.

The purser's office in the main saloon was vacant, but Hugh buttonholed a steward.

"Lord Chesby, sir? Yes, sir; he was one of the first ashore. There was a gentleman to meet him, I think, sir."

"That's queer," remarked Hugh, as we returned to the gangway.

"Our best bet is to go straight to the 'C' space in the customs lines," I said.

"But who could meet him besides us?" objected Hugh.

"It's queer," I agreed. "What does your uncle look like?"

"He's small, stocky, not fat. Must be around sixty," said Hugh vaguely.

We surveyed the space under the letter C, where passengers were arguing with the inspectors.

"No; he's not here," said Hugh. "Wait, though, there's Watkins!"

"Who's Watkins?" I asked, boring a passage beside him through the crowd.

"He's Uncle James' man."

Watkins was the replica of Hugh's description of his uncle. He was a chunky, solid sort of man, with the masklike face of the trained English servant. He was clean-shaven and dressed neatly in a dark suit and felt hat. When we came upon him he was sitting forlornly on a pile of baggage.

"Hello, Watty!" Hugh greeted him. "Where's my uncle?"

The valet's features lighted up, and he scrambled to his feet.

"Ah, Mr. Hugh! I'm very glad to see you, sir, if I may say so. 'Is ludship, sir? Why, 'e went off with your messenger, sir."

"My messenger?" Hugh repeated blankly.

"Yes, sir—the dark gentleman. Your man, 'e said 'e was, sir."

"My man!" Hugh appealed to me. "Did you hear that, Jack?"

Watkins became suddenly anxious.

"There's nothing wrong, I 'ope, sir. The gentleman came aboard to find us, and told 'is ludship 'ow you'd been delayed, and 'e was to come along to your rooms, sir, whilst I saw the luggage through the customs. Wasn't that right, sir?"

Hugh sat down on a trunk.

"It's right enough, Watty," he groaned, "except that I never sent such a message and I haven't a man."

"What sort of fellow was this messenger?" I asked.

Watkins turned to me.

"An Eastern-looking gentleman, 'e was, sir, like the Gipsies 'is ludship occasionally 'as down to Chesby. Strange, I thought it, sir, Mr. Hugh, that you should be 'aving a gentleman like that to valet you——"

"How long ago did Uncle James leave, Watty?" asked Hugh.

"Nearly an hour, sir."

"Time enough for him to have reached

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the apartment. Jack, do you mind telephoning on the off chance? I'll fetch an inspector to go over this stuff."

I had no difficulty in getting the apartment. The cleaning-woman who "did" for us answered. No; nobody had called, and there had been no telephone messages. I hastened back to the "C" space with a sense of ugly foreboding. Hugh I found conferring with Watkins, while two customs men opened Lord Chesby's baggage.

"Do you know, Jack," said Hugh seriously, "I am beginning to think that something sinister may have happened. Watty tells me that he and Uncle James are just come from Constantinople. He says my uncle went there convinced that he had discovered the key to the treasure's hiding-place, but, in some unexplained way, Uncle James was deterred from carrying out his plans, and they returned hurriedly to England."

"And now I think of it, sir," amended Watkins, "we 'ave been shadowed ever since we went to Turkey. I never paid much attention to them, considering it was coincidence like, but it's been one dark gentleman after another—at the Pera Palace Hotel in Constantinople, on the Orient Express, in London when we called on 'is ludship's solicitors——"

"What was that for?" interrupted Hugh—and to me: "Uncle James hated business. He couldn't be brought to any kind of business interview unless he had a pressing motive."

"Why, sir, Mr. Hugh, I don't know rightly. Leastways, 'twas after 'is conversation with Mr. Bellowes 'e gave me the cablegram to send to you, sir. And 'e 'ad the charter-chest sent up from the safe-deposit vaults—but 'e was looking through that before we went to Turkey, to be sure, sir."

"He was, eh? How was that?"

"Why, sir, 'e rang for me one day at Chesby, and 'e was rubbing 'is 'ands together like he does when 'e's pleased, and 'e said: 'Watkins, pack the small wardrobe and the portmanteau. We're going to run down to Constantinople.' 'Yes, sir,' I said. 'And do we go direct to Dover?' 'No,' 'e said; 'we'll go up to London. Wire Mr. Bellowes to 'ave the charter-chest sent up from the bank. I must 'ave another look at it.' 'E was talking to himself like, sir. 'I wonder if the hint might not 'ave been in the instructions after all.'"

Hugh jumped.

"By Jove! He has been after the treasure! The 'instructions' is the original parchment on which Hugh the First inscribed his command to his son to search for the treasure—carefully leaving out, however, the directions for finding it. And what happened then, Watty?"

"Why, sir, we went up to London, and Mr. Bellowes 'e tried to persuade 'is ludship not to go. They were together 'alf the morning, and when they came from the private office I 'eard Mr. Bellowes say: 'I'm afraid I can't follow your ludship. There's not a word in the instructions or any of the other documents to shed a ray of light on the matter.' 'That's what I wished to make sure of, Bellowes,' said 'is ludship, with a chuckle."

"Cryptic, to put it mildly," barked Hugh. "Damn it—I knew the old boy was up to some foolishness. If he's taken on some giddy crew of crooks for a piratical venture——"

"He wouldn't have called on you for help," I cut him off.

"True," assented Hugh. "But I wish I could take some stock in the nonsense at the bottom of it."

"I wonder," I said. "I'm drifting to Betty's belief that there is more in the treasure story than you think."

"It's bunk, I tell you," said Hugh, thoroughly disgusted. "Well, the customs men are through. Watty, collect some porters and get this baggage down to the taxi-stand."

THE cleaning-woman was still in the apartment when we returned, and she reiterated her assertion that nobody had called. We had some lunch, and then, on Watkins' suggestion, I rang up hotels for two hours—without any result. At the end of my tether, I hung up the receiver and joined Hugh in gloomy reflection on the couch.

"There's one thing more to do," said Hugh suddenly. "Telephone the police."

"That would involve publicity," I pointed out.

"It can't be helped."

The telephone-bell jangled harshly as

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he spoke, and I unhooked the receiver. Hugh started to his feet. Watkins entered from the dining-room noiselessly.

"Is this Mr. Chesby's apartment?" The voice that burred in my ear was strangely thick, with a guttural intonation. "Tell him they are taking what's left of his uncle to Bellevue. It's his own fault the old fool got it. And you can tell his nephew we will feed him a dose of the same medicine if he doesn't come across."

Brr-rring!

"Wait! Wait!" I gasped into the mouthpiece. "Who——"

"Number, please," said a stilted feminine voice.

"My God!" I cried. "Hugh, they've killed him, I think."

Hugh's face went white as I repeated the message. Watkins' eyes popped from his head.

"Where is this hospital?" stammered Hugh.

"Over on the East Side."

"We must find a taxi. Hurry!"

Watkins came with us without bidding. In the taxi none of us spoke. We were dazed. As we turned into East Twenty-sixth Street and the portals of the huge, red-brick group of buildings loomed ahead of us, Hugh exclaimed fiercely:

"It may not be true! I believe it was a lie!"

BUT it was not a lie, as we soon learned in the office to which we were ushered by a white-uniformed orderly. Yes, the nurse on duty told us; an ambulance had brought in an elderly man such as Hugh described within the half-hour. The orderly would show us the ward.

We traversed a maze of passages to a curtained doorway where a young surgeon, immaculate in white, awaited us.

"You want to see the old man who has been stabbed?" he said.

Hugh gripped my arm.

"Stabbed! Is he——"

The surgeon nodded.

"Yes. He must have made a hell of a fight. He's all slashed up—too old to stand the shock." Watkins caught his breath sharply. "Of course he may not be your man. This way."

He led us into a long room lined with beds. A high screen had been placed round one of them, and he drew it aside and motioned for us to enter. An older surgeon stood by the head of the narrow bed with a hypodermic needle in his hand. Opposite him kneeled a nurse. A bulky man in plain clothes, obviously a policeman, stood at the foot.

And against the pillow lay a head that might have been Hugh's frosted and lined by the years. The gray hair grew in the same even way as Hugh's. The hawk-nose, the deep-set eyes, the stubborn jaw, the close-clipped mustache, the small ears were all the same. As we entered, the eyes flashed open an instant, then closed.

"Uncle James!"

"'Is ludship! O Gawd!"

The policeman and the nurse eyed us curiously, but the surgeon by the bed kept his attention concentrated on the wan cheeks of the inert figure, finger pressing lightly on the pulse of a hand that lay outside the sheets. Swiftly he stooped, with a low ejaculation to the nurse. She swabbed the figure's arm with a dab of cotton, and the needle was driven home.

"Caught him up in time," remarked the surgeon impartially. "Best leave him while it acts." He turned to us. "I take it you recognize him, gentlemen."

"He is my uncle," answered Hugh dully.

"Ah! I fancy you will be able to secure a few words with him after the strychnia has taken hold, but he is slipping fast."

The policeman stepped forward.

"I am from the Detective Bureau," he said. "Do you know how this happened?"

"We know nothing," returned Hugh. "He landed from the *Aquitania* this morning. We were late in reaching the pier. When we reached it—" Some instinct prompted me to step on Hugh's foot. He understood. "He was gone, ostensibly to seek my apartment."

"Name?" asked the detective, thumbing a note-book.

"His? Chesby. It is mine, too."

"Initials?"

"His full name is James Hubert Chetwynd Crankhaugh Chesby."

"English?"

"Yes."

"Business or profession?"

"Well, I don't know how to answer that question. He is a scholar—and then he's a member of the House of Lords."

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"Gee-roosalum!" exclaimed the policeman. "This begins to look big. Who could have wanted to bump off a guy like him? Was he—a gay sort of old boy, eh?"

"Positively no! He was the last man to suspect of anything like that. He has been a traveler and student all his life."

"What was his specialty?"

"Gipsy dialects and history, and the ancient history of Constantinople."

"Gipsies, eh?" The detective was all alert. "He was picked up corner of Thirteenth Street and Avenue C. There's plenty of Gipsy dumps in that neighborhood. A man and three women saw him dropped from a closed automobile. The Gips are a bad people to get down on you, clannish as hell and awful suspicious. It may be this here Lord Chesby crossed some family of 'em in his studying, and they went out to knife him."

"It may be," agreed Hugh. "But I haven't a thing to back up the assertion with."

"Well, we'll start to work on that clue, anyhow."

THE detective stepped round the screen, and Hugh touched the senior surgeon on the arm.

"How long?"

"Probably only a few minutes."

As he spoke, the deep-sunk eyes reopened and surveyed us almost quizzically, one by one. Hugh bent forward, Watkins beside him.

"Do you know me, Uncle James?"

The lips parted, framed words that were barely audible.

"Good lad! Where's Watkins?"

"'Ere, your ludship," volunteered the valet, with a gulp.

"Send—others——"

Hugh looked up to the senior surgeon.

"Do you mind, sir?"

"Not at all. Just a moment, though."

He stooped to feel the pulse, reached for the needle and shot in a second injection. Its effect was instantaneous. The dying man's eyes brightened; a very faint tinge of color glowed in his ashen face.

"I'm afraid that second shot will hasten the end," the surgeon muttered to me, "but it will give the poor old fellow more strength while he lasts. Make the most of your opportunity."

He shepherded his assistants outside the screen, and Hugh pulled me to my knees beside him.

"This is Jack Nash, Uncle James," he said, speaking slowly and distinctly. "He is my friend—your friend. He will be with me in whatever I have to do for you."

Lord Chesby's eyes—a clear gray, they were—examined me closely.

"Looks—right." The syllables trickled almost soundless from his lips. "It's—treasure—Hugh." His eyes had a look of triumph. "Know—where——"

"But who stabbed you?"

I have often wondered what would have happened if Hugh had let him talk on of the treasure.

"Toutou," answered the dying man, with sudden strength. "Tiger—that chap—others—against—him."

"But why? Why did he do it?"

Once more the look of triumph in the eyes.

"Wouldn't — tell — him — treasure—said—torture—broke—away—Gipsies—" Exhaustion overcame him. His eyes closed.

Hugh crouched lower and held his watch-case to the blue lips. A mist clouded the polished surface.

"Give him time," he said. "Watty, who is Toutou?"

"Never 'eard of 'im, sir. Oh, Mr. Hugh, sir, is 'is ludship——"

The gray eyes opened; the lips began to move.

"Watch — out — that — gang — desperate—be—after—you."

"But who are they, Uncle James?"

"Toutou — worst — Beran — many—bad—lot."

"Where did they take you? Tell us, and we will have them arrested?"

The gray eyes glittered.

"No — no — lad — avoid — police — don't—talk—treasure——"

"Where is the treasure?" I interposed.

"Bull—cedars—li—" His breathing dwindled to little, fluttering gasps, but he fought on.

"How did you find it, Uncle James?" asked Hugh softly.

That gay look of triumph shone in his eyes for the last time.

"Used — my — brain — all — laughed — me—in—Hugh's—" And the life flickered out of him as we watched.

Everybody's Magazine, May, 1923

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Two big tears rolled down Watkins' cheeks.

"Oh, Mr. Hugh, sir, I do 'ope we can punish those bloody villains!"

"We will," said Hugh coldly, rising to his feet. "For the time being, Watkins, remember to keep your mouth shut about all this. Uncle James was right about the police. They can't help us in such a matter. If there is anything in the treasure story, we should wreck any chance of finding it by advertising our purpose."

"The less said, the better," I assented. "If the police ask us, he rambled at the end about Gipsies and family affairs."

There were several details to be settled with the hospital authorities. The British consulate had to be notified. Reporters had to be seen. It was early evening when we started back to the apartment, and the newsboys were yelling an extra.

I bought a copy and read it aloud as we walked down Fifth Avenue.

"One of the strangest murder-mysteries in the criminal annals of New York has been presented to the police for solution through the death in Bellevue Hospital this afternoon of James Hubert Chetwynd Crankhaugh Chesby, twenty-ninth Baron Chesby in the peerage of Great Britain, thirty-fifth lord of the Manor of Chesby and hereditary ranger of Crowden Forest.

"After landing from the *Aquitania* this morning, Lord Chesby, a dignified, scholarly man of fifty-eight, was lured away from the pier into the purlieus of the East Side, where, apparently after a valiant fight for life, he was set upon and hacked with knives. His body, still living, was left by an automobile——"

"Skip it," ordered Hugh impatiently. "What do they say of the object of the crime?"

"From the fact that Lord Chesby has made a lifelong study of Gipsy lore and dialects, the police suspect that some criminal of these nomad tribes may have slain the distinguished nobleman, either for personal gain or vengeance. Lord Chesby's nephew and heir, the Hon. Hugh James Ronald Howard Chesby, who is a Wall Street bond-broker, received a telephone message during the afternoon, notifying him of his uncle's fate and warning him that the same end would be his if he made any attempt to run down the assasins.

"The new Lord Chesby, when interviewed at——"

"I don't like it," interrupted Hugh again, frowning, "but it will have to stand. Uncle James wanted it that way, and his word is law. It will do no good to add to the story. The police can't help us. We are playing a lone hand. All rules are off."

"A lone hand," I repeated. "Does that mean Nikka is out of it? We agreed after the armistice that if we ever forsook the flesh-pots for the call of danger, it would be together."

"I hate to drag him away from his concerts," answered Hugh, considering. "He's making pots of money. But if there's a Gipsy angle to this, he'd be priceless to us."

"And he'd never forgive us if we left him out," I added.

"I suppose he wouldn't. Tell you what—we'll cable him to meet us in London at my solicitor's office. We've got a long way to go, Jack. We don't even know who we have to fight. As for the treasure—well, I want to talk to Bellowes first and have a look at the charter-chest."

AT LIVERPOOL we wired to Hugh's solicitors for an appointment that afternoon and despatched Watkins direct to Chesby with the body of his late master. We arrived at Euston Station about four o'clock and took a taxi to the offices of Courtenay, Bellowes, Manson & Courtenay in a smutted old building in Fleet Street.

Up two flights of stairs we climbed to a dirty door with the firm-name straggling across it. A clerk stepped forward as we entered, but before he could speak a lean brown figure shot out of an inner office and wrapped Hugh and me in a jovial hug. It was Nikka, thinner than we remembered him, but with the same steady eyes and quiet smile. He was abashed by his own enthusiasm and started to apologize.

"I am so glad to see you two," he said, "that I forgot it is a time of sadness. Yet, even so, it means gladness for me that I see my friends again."

"It's gladness for all of us," returned Hugh, wringing his hand with its delicate, sinewy fingers.

"It means something like the old life once more," I added. "That is, if you come, Nikka."

"I'll come," he said simply. "For two years I have been faithful to my fiddle. Now, I think, it is time I had a rest."

An elderly gentleman with gray hair and precise features emerged from the inner offices and bowed deferentially to Hugh.

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"I take it, then," remarked Betty, rising, with a detached air, "that you have no desire to go to Constantinople."

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"I hope your lordship is in good health. If you remember——"

"Of course, Mr. Bellowes," assented Hugh; "I remember you very well. This is my friend, Mr. Nash. Mr. Zaranko, I take it, you already know. Are you at liberty?"

"Surely, sir. I expected you. This way, please.

HE USHERED us into a room where chairs were clustered about a square table on which reposed a huge steel-bound box of very heavy dark oak. Mr. Bellowes waved his hand toward the box.

"I trust I anticipated your lordship's wishes. I directed the bank to send up the charter-chest this afternoon."

"Quite right," said Hugh. "It will simplify our task. Did my uncle leave a will?"

A shadow settled upon Mr. Bellowes's lined face.

"There was no need, your lordship. The estate is entailed. The shipping bonds, your grandmother's dower, went before the war. The mining shares all have been sold, as well as several smaller blocks of securities. Aside from some insurance accruing from your uncle's demise, there is practically nothing—oh, a few government bonds of the war-issues, to be sure—outside of the Chesby lands." He wrung his hands nervously. "Oh, Mr. Hugh—I beg your pardon, your lordship—I don't know what we shall have to do. The death-duties can hardly be met. The insurance will help some, but I am afraid we must raise another mortgage at a ruinous rate or else move to break the entail and sell off some of the farms. I warned his late lordship again and again of the harm he was doing."

"Poor Uncle James has paid a stiff price for his efforts," answered Hugh. "I can't find it in my heart to take exception to his extravagances after what has happened."

The old lawyer looked at us slyly.

"Just what did happen, if I may ask, sir? The reports in the press were——"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"He was murdered by a gang of criminals who were trying to obtain from him information which he apparently believed furnished a clue to this treasure he had been searching for all his life," returned Hugh.

"Really, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Bellowes.

"Why did you suppose he was killed within a few hours of landing in a strange city?" countered Hugh.

The solicitor hesitated.

"If your lordship will permit me to speak quite frankly? Ah! Thank you, sir. I will say, then, that I had fancied I knew your uncle unusually well, and in light of that knowledge I would never have fancied him addicted to—er—" He coughed apologetically. "Probably I need not say any more. But at any rate it will not be offensive if I add that, in a long course of legal experience, I have never heard of a man of his late lordship's position being murdered unless—unless there were circumstances of a character we may describe offhand as 'unsavory.'"

There was a brief silence.

"I infer that is the general supposition?" asked Hugh, rousing himself.

"I fear it is, your lordship."

"And it is absolutely untrue!" exclaimed Hugh, with energy. "I know that."

"Then why not make the facts known?" suggested Mr. Bellowes.

"If we did so, we should have a negligible chance of establishing our point, and we should certainly lose whatever slight chance there may be of finding the treasure. I am sure my uncle would have wished us to go after the treasure at any cost."

"The treasure?" Mr. Bellowes permitted himself a faint smile of amusement. "Am I to understand that your lordship has succumbed to this fatal lure?"

"You may understand I am extremely interested in the possibility of finding it," retorted Hugh.

"Dear, dear!" murmured the aged solicitor, genuinely distressed. "Surely you will listen to reason, sir. This *fata morgana* has exercised an evil influence upon your family time out of mind. Your uncle is one of a number of people whose lives have been cursed by its futile spell. I do hope you will permit me to urge you to abandon an attempt which must infallibly dissipate whatever is left of your estate."

"But you tell me that the estate is wrecked in any case," replied Hugh. "I do not blame you for one instant for being skeptical, Mr. Bellowes. I felt so myself until recent events forced me to the conclusion that there may—notice, please, that I say 'may'—be more to the matter

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than I had imagined. I am anxious to secure your advice, and therefore I propose that Mr. Nash and I recount for you and Mr. Zaranko precisely what happened in connection with my uncle's visit to New York."

MR. BELLOWES was visibly shocked by the tale.

"I had not supposed such criminals existed any longer," he said. "However, let me draw your attention to the fact that these incidents happened in New York. They could never have happened in England."

"They might have happened anywhere," interjected Nikka, speaking for the first time. His face was very serious as he leaned forward over the table. "In the first place," he continued, "consider this treasure. I have always heard of it as the 'Treasure of the Bucoleon,' but I believe it is also sometimes referred to as the 'Treasure of Andronicus.' "

"What! You, too, have heard of it?" exclaimed Mr. Bellowes.

"Yes. It is well known in the Near East. I am a Gipsy. My father was Voivode Tzaibidjo, or king of the Balkan Gipsies. Many tales come to my ears, for, though my people are scattered far and wide and no longer make pretense of being a nation, they still honor those who have been their leaders. I have heard, for instance, a story that a certain tribe of Gipsies in Constantinople guard the supposed site of the treasure. But I do not vouch for the story. I do, however, vouch for the statement that Lord Chesby is confronting an organized international band of criminals with many Gipsy members, and I do not believe that such a band would waste time on any enterprise which they did not have good reason to believe would promise handsome profits."

"You mean to say that such a band could operate in England to-day?" demanded the old lawyer doubtfully.

"They can, and almost certainly they do. Crime has increased since the war, remember. The removal of national barriers and the unsettlement of conditions have stimulated it anew. I know something of this band. If it is the one I have heard of, we are menaced by the most intelligent combination of thieves, murderers and outlaws that ever acted together."

"What do you know about them?" I asked.

"I have heard that they are doing a great deal of smuggling, and it is in this work that they use the Gipsies especially. I have heard, too, of this Toutou you speak of. He is usually called 'Toutou Lafitte,' but he has many names. He is said to be a combination of bloodthirsty monster and intensely clever strategist. The band have ramifications in all classes of society, and there are few countries they do not reach. I have no doubt they made arrangements in your uncle's case with some affiliated criminal organization in America."

"Where do you get all this information?" asked Hugh curiously.

"I am a Gipsy," answered Nikka. "We Gipsies are really a separate people, and I grieve to say our lower orders constitute a criminal class. As it happens, I am well known to my people, and many of them come and tell me what they hear."

"Why don't you tell this to the police?" demanded Mr. Bellowes.

"What good would it do? The police would laugh at me behind my back—and I should be stabbed some dark night as I came from a concert. No; I can turn my knowledge to better use by aiding Lord Chesby in his quest."

"It's blamed lucky we have Nikka to help us!" I exclaimed. "And I'd like to ask him for his candid opinion on the treasure business."

"I don't know," said Nikka slowly. "I should not like to raise Hugh's hopes, but—put it this way: I should not be surprised if it were true. Before we go any farther, let us ascertain the facts we have to go upon."

"That is my idea," agreed Hugh. "Mr. Bellowes, I gathered from Watkins that my uncle discussed his discovery with you. Did he indicate precisely what it was?"

Mr. Bellowes joined his fingers tip to tip with meticulous precision. A thoughtful expression possessed his face.

"I might as well admit," he began, "that you have shaken my judgments in the matter. The circumstances narrated are extraordinary. I am not prepared as yet to endorse your conclusions, yet—well, that is by the way, your lordship. Watkins is correct in his supposition. Your uncle did discuss his—ah—fancied discovery with me.

Everybody's Magazine, May, 1923

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Aside from the fact that he had made it while at Chesby——"

"At Chesby?" Hugh interrupted.

"So I understood. He came in to see me just before he started for Constantinople. He was considerably excited.

" 'By Jove, Bellowes!' he said. 'Do you know I've found the missing part of the instructions?' I remember I pooh-poohed his claim, and instead of becoming angry, as he usually did, he laughed at me. 'Oh, you may doubt,' he said, 'but I'm going to Constantinople, and I shall soon know whether I am correct or not.'

" 'You have been to Constantinople before,' I said to him, 'but you never obtained any information.'

" 'I lacked the key,' was his answer. 'To think that all these years nobody ever found it!'

"I ventured to remind him of a mortgage coming due which could be extended only at an increased rate, and he replied:

" 'We'll attend to that without any difficulty. I tell you, Bellowes, it's all perfectly plain in the missing half of the instructions.'

"Then he had me get out the charter-chest, saying he wished to go over the old half of the instructions to see if there had not been a hint of the hiding-place in that or any of the other old documents."

"Was there?" questioned Hugh.

"If there was, he did not tell me, your lordship. He went away without any comment, and the next I saw of him was perhaps three weeks later when he returned from Constantinople. He was even more excited than he had been before.

" 'I really think there's something in it,' he said. 'I shall have Watkins cable my nephew. I am going to need some young blood in this. It's there, Bellowes, I am persuaded, but we shall have to figure carefully on getting it out.' "

"Humph," said Hugh. "That's not much to go on. Do you know what he did with the missing half of the instructions he said he found?"

"No, sir. He never showed it to me, and, so far as I know, he did not have it in his possession when he was here."

"He wouldn't have carried it, or even a copy of it, if he had supposed others had an interest in it," I interposed.

"True," assented Hugh. "Well, let's have a look at the charter-chest."

Mr. Bellowes went to a safe in the corner and took from an inner compartment a bunch of heavy keys, some of them comparatively modern, others clumsy and ancient. With these he opened lock after lock along front and sides of the old chest. Hugh and I carefully raised the lid. A musty odor floated up to us. The chest itself was packed with smaller boxes, some of wood and some of iron and steel.

THE aged solicitor indicated a massive steel box in one corner.

"That contains the instructions and related documents, your lordship," he said, and, lifting it to the table-top, fitted a small key to the lock.

There was a click, and the cover flew back. Inside there was a wooden cover, which Hugh pried up with his thumb-nail, and below that a layer of oiled silk, and below that again several layers of cloths, silk and linen. Finally we came to several framed parchments, with glasses in front and back.

"Your uncle did that," explained Mr. Bellowes. "He was afraid they would be ruined by handling and exposure."

The first frame contained a sheet of parchment, I should say, twelve inches by ten, covered with minute black-letter script in a rather corrupt form of medieval Latin.

"That is Hugh's 'instructions,' " said the solicitor. "I'd advise you not to strain your eyes trying to make out the original. We had a very careful translation prepared and checked over by scholars at Oxford."

He drew out a typewritten sheet of foolscap, and Nikka and I read it over Hugh's shoulder:

INSTRUCTIONS of Hugh, Lord of Chesby: I, Hugh, write this for my son and, it may be, those who come after him.

In the reign of the Emperor Andronicus Comnenus my father visited Constantinople, and the emperor made much of him. At the emperor's request my father aided in the disposition of a certain treasure which Andronicus had amassed by confiscating and fining the estates of rebel nobles. None save these two knew the location of the treasure.

It chanced that my father passed overseas to the Holy Land to make good his vows to Our Lady the Virgin, and the Emperor Andronicus was slain by his enemies. The emperor who succeeded Andronicus sent urgent messages to my father, bidding him visit Constantinople that the new emperor might do him honor. And in time my father journeyed again to Constantinople, and the emperor

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would have had him yield the secret of the treasure. But my father would not, because Andronicus had obtained from him a solemn oath never to give up the treasure to any save one who would spend it for the bettering of the empire, and the new emperor craved it for his courtiers and courtesans. Then the emperor threw my father into prison, and so kept him until Messer Baldwin of Flanders and Messer Dandolo of Venice and the barons of the Crusade went against the emperor and smote him down.

Ill fortune continued to beset the empire, and so my father kept the secret. In God's appointed time he died and passed on the secret to me. Now, I, too, see Death riding toward me, nor do I fear it, for those I love are in the shadow-worlds of hell or purgatory.

Harken, then, my son, and those of your seed who come after us. The lords of Constantinople are rotten. Their empire dwindles away. The treasure is not for such as they. Therefore I say it shall go to augment the fortunes of our house and recompense my father's sufferings.

Take it, he who can. But beware the Greeks, for some know of the treasure and the secret will not die.

In Manus tuas, Domine!

Hugh let fall the typed script, and we all stared reverently at the original parchment under its sheltering glass. There was something inexpressibly poignant about these words carried across the ages.

"Is there anything else?" asked Hugh. "It's odd he speaks so impressively of going after the treasure, and yet he offers no hint of how to find it. Was the secret always unknown? But no; of course not. There was that chap in Henry the Fifth's time, and the Elizabethan Hugh. They knew where it was."

"There is another document here which sheds light upon that phase of the mystery," volunteered Mr. Bellowes, and he sorted an envelope from the mass of documents in the steel box.

FROM the envelope he drew a heavy sheet of yellowed linen paper inscribed in an angular feminine hand in very faded black ink.

"This was written by the widow of the Elizabethan Hugh," the old solicitor continued. "Her husband, as you may remember, my lord, never returned from one of his voyages. His lady seems to have been a strong-minded person, after the fashion of her royal mistress, indeed. She was in charge of the estate for some years during the minority of her son, and she evidently used her authority."

He spread the paper before us. It was dated "Castle Chesby, ye 5th Sept., 1592," and we read the vigorous strokes with ease:

Forasmuch as yt hath pleased God to sette mee in authoritie in this my deere late Husband's place, I have seene fitte to Take that Roote of Evill which hath beene ye bane of Oure race Fromme oute ye Chartar Cheste and putte yt where yt may Wreak noe more Of harmme and Sorrowe. I will not have my Sonne awasting of Hys substaunce and hys Life as didde Hys deere Fathour.

JANE CHESBY.

Postscriptum: Yette will I leave a trase for Thatte yt might seeme Unfaithfull to ye Dead didde I lose thatte whych ys a part of ye House's wealthe.

"What do you make out of that?" I asked in bewilderment.

Hugh and Mr. Bellowes laughed.

"I remember hearing of this, but I never saw it before," said Hugh. "Jane Chesby was a character, by all accounts."

"The tradition," said the solicitor, "is that the 'Roote of Evill' was the part of the instructions containing the directions to the location of the treasure. At any rate, there is no record of its having been seen since the date of Lady Jane's minute."

"But the 'trase' she speaks of?" I queried.

"Nobody has ever found it—unless Lord James did so."

"What is that on the back of the paper?" Nikka asked.

"The lady seems also to have been a poetess," said Mr. Bellowes, with a smile. "They are some lines she scrawled, apparently without any reference to the matter on the other side."

Nikka turned the paper over. The lines were scrawled, as the lawyer had said, diagonally across the sheet:

Putte downe ye Anciount riddel
In Decente, Seemelie ordour.
Rouse, O ye mystick Sybil,
Vex Hymme who doth Endeavour,
Nor treate Hys efortte tendour.

"A farrago of antique spelling and nonsense," commented Hugh.

"Still, I suggest we take a copy of it with us," said Nikka.

"It won't do any harm," agreed Mr. Bellowes, and he called a stenographer and directed him to make copies of the two writings.

"This Lady Jane was a ferocious Protestant," pursued Hugh reflectively. "It

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was she who blocked up the old family crypt, saying it was not fit to bury Protestant Chesbys with the Papist lords in a place that had known the rites of the Scarlet Woman and all that sort of stuff."

"Yes," said Mr. Bellowes, turning from the stenographer. "And if you recall, my lord, she blocked up the crypt so successfully that its exact location has been a mystery ever since." And to us he explained: "It lies somewhere under the extensive ruins of Crowden Priory, an old monastic establishment which was closely linked with Chesby in the middle ages."

Hugh rose reluctantly.

"I am afraid we have learned nothing here," he said. "Have we exhausted the charter-chest?"

"Unless you wish to read the brief records of the Elizabethan Hugh and his ancestor of Henry the Fifth's time," replied the lawyer. "Neither furnishes any concrete information."

"Then we have done all we can," said Hugh. "We'll take the night train for Chesby."

Mr. Bellowes suspended his work of returning the several documents to their places in the steel box.

"I do hope you will take thought to whatever you do, your lordship," he urged. "As you see, the trail so far is blind, and whatever validity we may attach to your uncle's assertion that he had discovered the clue, it must be manifest that you are helpless until you have learned as much as he did."

"You are quite right," returned Hugh, somewhat to the old gentleman's surprise. "But we intend to find out what my uncle discovered. If he did not overrate his achievement, then you may be sure that we shall do everything in our power to obtain the treasure.

"You must admit that common sense can dictate no other course. You say I am ruined as it is. Well then, I can well afford to risk whatever is left on the chance of extricating the estate."

The lawyer wagged his gray head sorrowfully.

"It's a very sad situation for me, Mr. Hugh—beg pardon, your lordship," he sighed. "One way, as you say; it's ruin, to put the facts bluntly. The other way, there'll be terrible danger. Well, sir, I wish you and your friends the best of luck, and whatever poor service I can afford you, you may rely upon."

THE inimitable Watkins met us at Chesby station with a motor in which we were whirled off through murky woods and a half-seen park to a low, rambling building of varying architecture set on the summit of a saddleback hill. Lights showed in one wing, but the center and other wing were darkened.

"I'm very sorry, your ludship," apologized Watkins, as he assisted us from the car in front of a Tudor archway. "It's been some years since the 'ouse has been opened. Your uncle 'e was used to living 'ere in the old wing, and we're understaffed, if I may say so, your ludship."

"It suits me, Watty," returned Hugh. "My friends are not company, and, of course, we shall not entertain."

He stood on the door-step, glancing round him at the thick, ivy-draped walls and the machicolated parapets which lined the roofs.

"Welcome to Chesby, you chaps!" he hailed us. "It gives me a thrill to come here. I haven't seen it since before the war, except for one brief visit two years ago, and I haven't really lived here since I was a lad."

A butler no less dignified than Watkins held the door open for us, and a palsied footman strove with the valet for custody of our scanty baggage. Watkins motioned both aside when we entered the hall.

"This way, if you please, your ludship and gentlemen," he said. "I 'ave 'ad supper served in the gun-room. Far more cheery it is, sir, with a bright fire and all, than the other rooms."

"That's fine!" approved Hugh, and he led us after Watkins through a short passage to the right and into a big room with mullioned windows deeply embrasured and carved oaken rafters and stone walls showing above the rich paneling that rose a tall man's height from the floor. At one side was a vast fireplace, with chimney-piece, ingle-nooks and overmantel elaboately carved. A log fire blazed on the dogs, and before it, warmly illuminated, a table was set with snowy linen and silver emblazoned with the Chesby crest, a mailed arm clutching a dagger and beneath it an open eye, with the motto: "I search."

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Hugh rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

"This is home," he said. But a shadow instantly chased the smile from his lips. "And if Bellowes is correct, it will continue to be my home only if we succeed in finding something lost more than seven hundred years ago."

"If it is to be found, we shall find it," answered Nikka. "What a beautiful room!"

"I was going to say the same thing," I said. "As an architect, I have tried to achieve this effect for rich Americans, but I must admit I can't do with mere money what time and many men's imaginations have accomplished here."

"And women's imaginations, too," replied Hugh. "This is the oldest part of the castle, but it has felt the influence of that redoubtable Lady Jane you heard about this afternoon. I believe this wing is supposed to be the remains of the Angevin keep and great hall of the first Hugh's castle, which were partially destroyed in the Wars of the Roses, and again by fire in Bloody Mary's time. Lady Jane rebuilt this wing and joined it with what was then the modern and early-Tudor central mass."

Curious, I stepped over to the fireplace and examined the splendid carvings in deep relief that adorned stone and woodwork. High up, near the roof on the overmantel, I discerned the family crest, together with numerous heraldic shields in colors faded and dimmed. But the most curious feature of the ornamentation was a lower panel supported by a group of bibulous monks in comically disordered attitudes. On the panel appeared to be lettering.

"Watkins," I called, "bring me a candle, please!"

He lifted a weighty candelabrum from the table and carried it toward me, Hugh and Nikka trailing him like small boys eager to view anything new. As he held it aloft, arm-high, the soft light shone on four lines of Gothic lettering which had once been gilded. They showed clearly in the age-old oak of the paneling:

Whenne thatte ye Pappist Churchmanne
Woudde seke Hys Soul's Contente
Hee tookened up ye Wysshinge Stone
And trodde ye Prior's Vent.

"I had forgotten that!" exclaimed Hugh. "It's some more of Lady Jane's poetry."

"She seems to have been rather hipped that way," I suggested.

"Now you speak of it, I can't recall any other specimens of her wit in rime," answered Hugh, puzzled.

"But what was her idea here?" I persisted, for the whimsicality of the thing interested me.

"Oh, as I told you, she was virulently anti-Catholic," said Hugh carelessly. "It was she, you know, who sealed up the old family crypt and built a new one in the priory, as the parish church is called. She probably believed that the former monks of the priory had been more interested in their wine-cellar than in masses."

"But the 'prior's vent'? What on earth is that?"

"I don't know, unless it was the way to the wine-cellar. Don't you see the point?"

"No, I don't. And this 'wysshinge-stone,' too? What could that be?"

"It must have been something connected with entering the wine-cellar. Oh, it's all perfectly simple, Jack. Crowden Priory was one of those establishments guilty of abuses which furnished Henry the Eighth with his excuse for looting the monastic orders. The facts were still a matter of memory in Lady Jane's time, and she took advantage of them to mock the Catholics. That's all."

I DID not answer him, for I had become engrossed in the decorations of the stone mantel itself, a magnificent piece of free-stone, sculptured in a frieze of Turks' heads, sphinxes and veiled women, ranged alternately.

"Well, she—or her masons, I should say—did a fine job," I said at last, tearing myself reluctantly from the beautiful courses of stone and the even flags of the hearth.

"You'll have plenty of time to indulge your architect's eye hereabout," declared Hugh from the table. "Come and eat, or Nikka will leave you nothing. Watty, what is the news?"

The valet deposited a chafing-dish and stand by my place.

"Mr. Penfellow, the vicar, your ludship, instructed me to tell you the service for 'is late ludship would be to-morrow morning, as you requested. Oh, yes, sir—and Mr. Hilyer was over from Little Depping this afternoon in a motor—with some ladies,

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sir—and asked after you. 'E said 'e would be at the funeral, sir."

Hugh frowned.

"I will not have anything to do with that bounder," he grunted.

"'E 'as quite a lively time, so the servants tell me, your ludship," volunteered Watkins. "A regular 'ouse-party 'e's entertaining now, with foreign gentry and all."

"They would be foreign," retorted Hugh. "He can't get a decent Englishman inside his house."

"What's the matter with the man?" inquired Nikka.

"Everything. The Hilyers own the next place to us—Little Depping, it's called. They were always decent enough people, but this chap, Monty Hilyer, is a wrong 'un. He got into trouble before the war with the stewards of the Jockey Club and was barred from the course. Then he picked up a reputation as a card-sharp and society gambler. For a while he used to hang round Continental resorts and fleece the innocent. When the war came he enlisted, made a splendid record and earned a commission. The next thing that happened was a scandal in his mess over heavy play, and he was compelled to resign. He's a bad egg through and through. Odd, though, how he keeps up Little Depping. I believe he's been on short rations more than once, but he always has managed to preserve the estate—and, like me, he's the last of the line."

Watkins removed the savory and received a platter of sandwiches from the butler, whom he permitted to come no farther than the door.

"And your ludship may remember, Mr. Hilyer married some years ago—before 'e got into trouble, sir," Watkins observed, as he placed the platter before us. "She was, if I may say so, your ludship, not one of us."

Watkins contrived to express deep disapprobation without wrinkling or contorting his countenance, a trick at which I always marveled.

"Quite so," assented Hugh. "She was an actress or something like that. Well, it's in the beggar's favor that he married her. But they can't come footling round here. I'd have the whole county up in arms against me."

We chatted on for a while, and then Watkins guided us to the upper story, where three adjoining bedrooms had been made ready.

"The bathroom is across the 'all, sir," he informed me, stopping at my door on his way from Hugh's room. "My room is beside it. You 'ave only to ring, sir, if you wish anything. Good-night, sir."

As he left, I reflected, with a grin, that I had not been so coddled since my schooldays as in the brief period following his adoption of Hugh and myself. For that was what it amounted to. For all his deference and servility, neither Hugh nor I would have dared withstand any wish which Watkins gave serious expression to, and, furthermore, he made us feel constantly that we were obligated to maintain a certain standard of conduct which he, Watkins, might find satisfaction in.

I WAS up early the next morning, and a brief scouting-tour revealed Nikka's room empty, while Hugh snoozed blissfully on. So I shaved and bathed, and descended the broad, shallow stairs into the entrance-hall below. This wing, I noted, seemed to shut off entirely from the remainder of the house. At any rate, there were no open corridors.

Watkins was arranging flowers in a luster bowl on a table under an oriel window, and I mentioned this fact to him as I stood on the lowest step, drinking in the wonderful satisfaction of a perfectly designed and furnished entrance, something that it takes the average architect ten years to learn how to do.

"You are right, sir," he answered. "There are corridors, but they shut off, in order to save heat, sir, and prevent drafts. Since the death of the old lord, sir—Mr. Hugh's grandfather—we 'ave 'ad such a small family that no occasion was found for all the rooms. And the old wing, sir, is a large 'ouse by itself."

"Well, that makes so much less for us to defend," I said.

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"In case our friends of Toutou's gang should try to attack us," I explained.

But Watkins was as positive as Mr. Bellowes that such things could not happen in England.

"Oh, sir, sure I am you need not concern yourself for that," he said seriously. "They

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would never dare. The constabulary, sir—and all that."

"Perhaps," I said. "What is that music?"

He inclined his ear toward the door of a room that opened from the opposite side of the hall to the gun-room.

"Oh, sir, that's Mr. Nikka. 'E's in the music-room a-playing to 'imself, sir."

I CROSSED to the door and peered inside. Nikka was sitting at a pianoforte in a flood of sunshine, and the music poured from his lips and fingers like the sunshine, passionately intense, warm and vital. It stirred me as I listened, searching out primitive impulses, painting sound-pictures of outlandish scenes, spreading exotic odors over that conventional room. It was rebellious, uncivilized, untamed—and I liked it. The words and the melody, savage, melancholy, joyously somber, beat their way into my brain.

"Sad is the ache in my heart;
The cities crowd me in.
I may not breath for their stench;
My ears are deaf from their din.

"Let me go forth from their ways,
Out where the road runs free.
Twisting over the Balkan hills
Down to the restless sea.

"The dust shall caress my feet;
The sun shall warm my limbs.
The trees shall tell me their thoughts
At dusk as the twilight dims.

"And I shall inhale the smoke
Of fires beside the road.
I shall hear the camels grunt
As the drivers shift their loads.

"And, best of all, I shall hear
The wild, mad Tzigane songs,
Cruel and gay and lustful.
Like fiddles and clanging gongs.

"And in the glare of the camp-fires
I shall see the Tziganes dance—
Women with lithe, round bodies,
Men straight as a Haiduk's lance.

"And perhaps a wild brown maiden
Will seek me amongst the throng,
And dance with me down the twisting road
To a wild, mad Tzigane song."

He ended with a crashing of keys and looked up to meet my fascinated gaze.

"You like it?" he asked shyly. "I can see you did. It is a little song I have made out of the heart-beats of my people." He walked over and slipped his arm through mine. "Let us see what Watty has for breakfast," he went on, "and send him to waken that lazybones, Hugh——"

"But see here, Nikka," I broke in; "are you really a Gipsy? In the usual sense of the word?"

He considered as he explored a fruit-dish.

"I don't know what you mean by 'the usual sense of the word,'" he answered finally. "I am a Gipsy by birth and blood. I passed my boyhood with the caravans. I learned to play the fiddle with the Gipsy *maestri* of Hungary."

"It's funny," I admitted; "but I never quite envisaged you as a Gipsy until I heard you sing that song."

Nikka smiled.

"I can understand that. I made up that song because I was feeling the lure of the blood. The Gipsy in me has been crying out for assertion. I think that is one reason why I was so glad to have Hugh call on me. I smelled in his need a chance to sample the old, wild life again."

"Do you believe the Gipsies play a part in this treasure business?" I asked.

"I feel it in my bones," he replied. "It is a Gipsy tradition, remember. You may be sure we shall find the interest of some Tzigane tribe crossing ours."

"And then?"

"My tribe fight for Hugh."

"Your tribe?"

"Surely. I have a tribe. They fight for my hand and for my friends."

I regarded him with increased respect.

"That has a delightfully medieval sound. It strikes me you are going to be the most valuable member of this expedition."

"All for one, and one for all!" He laughed and waved a greeting to Hugh, who came in at that moment. "We are talking about Gipsies and fighting," he explained.

"And Nikka is a potentate who has a tribe to carry out his wishes," I added.

"I wish we had his tribe here to help us pull down this old stone box," answered Hugh gloomily. "How else are we going to uncover any hiding-places? And I feel like fighting when I remember that we are going to Uncle James' funeral this morning. Well, the best way to fight, I suppose, is to search. That's the family motto.

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Jack, you'll have a first-rate opportunity to investigate early structural methods in English architecture. I expect you'll be the only one to get anything out of the affair."

Which last was a very poor piece of prophecy.

MR. PENFELLOW, the vicar, received us at the west door of the parish church, a gigantic edifice which was all that was left of the once noble foundation of the Priory of St. Cuthbert of Crowden. With verger and curate striving mightily to equal his solemn countenance, he escorted Hugh—and, incidentally, Nikka and me—up the center aisle to a high-walled pew directly under the choir. Immediately behind us Watkins was marshaling the slender array of servants from Castle Chesby, all of whom had come to pay the last honors to their dead master.

The church was so large that the considerable congregation was swallowed up in its echoing nave. The transepts contained nothing save monuments and tombs. The tempered light that stole through stained-glass windows left most of the space in shadow; but I descried, beyond the breadth of the crossing, a second boxlike pew identical with ours, and in it a company whose gay raiment and gabbling ways were out of place in contrast with the stolid piety of the village folk and neighboring gentry.

"There's Hilyer," muttered Hugh in my ear, as the verger pompously presented his mace and the vicar withdrew toward the altar.

But we had no time to spare for observing the county's black sheep. Mr. Penfellow's quavering, nasal voice began to intone the stately rite of the Established Church for the dead. The shrill voices of the choir-boys responded. Our eyes became fastened upon the oblong casket, resting on its low catafalque under the choir railing, which contained the body of James Chesby, that quaint, whimsical, twentieth-century knight errant who had upheld the traditions of his race by tilting over the world in pursuit of a prize which all sober men proclaimed to be impossible of attainment.

And he had as good as found it! Laughed at, derided, mocked and ridiculed, he had persisted doggedly in what he had regarded as his life-work. He had succeeded where all others had failed or feared to venture. And at the last, probably when he envisaged complete success in his grasp, he had accepted death rather than yield the prize to any but his heir. He must have had good stuff in him.

As I thought of him, cut and hacked by that brute, Toutou, I found my fingers clenching on the book-rack in front of me, and, glancing down, I saw that Hugh's knuckles, too, were white. We exchanged a grim glance. For the first time we understood fully that we were playing a man's game, a game in which there was no limit. And we experienced the thirst for action which comes from a desire to slake unsatisfied vengeance. This task we had set ourselves to was more than a hunt for treasure. It was likewise a pursuit of James Chesby's murderers.

Nikka must have read somewhat of our thoughts in our faces, for he reached behind me and slid a hand over Hugh's straining knuckles; and I saw that his lips were shut tight and his eyes blazing like coals under their eagle-brows. And then my gaze chanced to stray toward the opposite side of the crossing, and in the shadows that hovered over the Hilyer pew I glimpsed a pair of eyes that gleamed with the evil green light of a beast of prey. For an instant only they showed. Then the shadows moved and they disappeared. But I shuddered, vaguely conscious of a spiritual menace horrible beyond description.

I looked again and saw nothing. It must have been fancy, I told myself—a trick of the sunbeams filtering through the party-colored glass of the windows.

The formal service was soon ended, and after the congregation had filed out, a little knot of men from the Chesby farms poised the casket on their shoulders and paced slowly after Mr. Penfellow and the verger down the broad winding stairs to the pillared crypt. At the east end, beneath the altar, the verger unlocked a massy oaken door and behind that an iron gate. There was a minute's delay while he lit tall candles, and then the little procession marched on into the last resting-place of the Chesbys.

It was an octagonal chamber, Tudor in style and extraordinarily spacious, the

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groined roof springing lightly from slender pillars. At the far end was a simple altar, and all round the other segments of the octagon were ledges in two tiers. At intervals over the floor-space were tombs and sarcophagi. The flickering candles brought out an occasional inscription:

Hugh James Cuthbert. . . : twenty-eighth Baron Chesby."

Claudia Anne, Lady Chesby, *aetat* 34, beloved . . . James, twenty-first. . . . "

On several coffins reposing on the side ledges there were the moldering remnants of old flags. On one lay an officer's cocked hat and sword, tarnished and covered with dust.

Mr. Penfellow was bowing to Hugh.

"The—ah—space next your grandfather, I suppose?"

Hugh nodded dumbly, and the men carrying the casket shifted it gently into the niche adjoining the twenty-eighth baron's. Once they had set it in place we were at some difficulty to distinguish it from those above and on either side of it. They were all exactly alike. And how different, probably, had been the men and women they held!

Hugh stumbled forward and knelt beneath his uncle's casket. Nikka, beside me, breathed hastily in my ear:

"I can't stand this, Jack. How can people be buried in stone vaults like this? I'm choking."

Without waiting for a reply he slipped away between the pillars, and I was left alone with Mr. Penfellow. The verger was just shepherding the pall-bearers through the gate.

"A very sad chapter in the glorious history of this ancient family, Mr. Nash," murmured the vicar, with moist eyes. "But surely no man could hope for a grander Valhalla." He gestured toward the encircling tombs. "All of the line since Elizabethan times—that is, all the lords and their ladies. Cadets and collaterals are buried elsewhere in the church. Have you heard the story of Lady Jane Chesby, the builder of this chamber? Ah! Very interesting, is it not? Her own husband was lost at sea, you know. But here is an empty tomb she reared to him."

He led me to the handsomest sarcophagus in the center of the chamber. On the marble lid was carved, life-size, the effigy of a man in half-armor, sea-boots and morion. In his hands, clasped upon his breast, he grasped a sextant.

THE lettering of the inscription on the side I hastily deciphered as:

James Matthew Kymmer, Baron Chesby, Hereditarie Rangare of Crowdene Woode, Admirall of ye Queene's Gracious Majestie, Scourge of ye Spaniards and all Papists and Infidells, Lost at Sea, Anno apud. 1590."

And, underneath, this:

Deere Lord, I, thatte was yr Bedfellowe, do reare thys thatte yf yt please Godde so to do and He bringe You to my Side there shal not Lacke a Space.

"The famous Lady Jane rests under the adjoining sarcophagus with the plain lid," continued the vicar. "I wish we might find the old crypt. It is somewhere under the priory grounds, but she concealed it very effectually. The tradition is that the old lords were buried in their mail. They were all noted as warriors. Ah, Lord Chesby"—as Hugh rose and walked over to us—"this has been very sad—very sad, indeed. And yet, as I was saying to Mr. Nash, it is something for a man after he dies to be brought back to wait the last trump in such glorious company."

"I am afraid I have been thinking of the criminals who murdered my uncle," said Hugh curtly. "You have been very kind, sir. I should like to thank you and everybody else for what they have done. Where's Nikka, Jack? Gone up? Do you mind if we leave you to shut the vault, Mr. Penfellow? Thank you again."

He hooked his arm in mine, and together we passed out of that sepulchral chamber, with its great company of illustrious dead. Up-stairs, in the church porch, Nikka was awaiting us.

"I'm sorry, Hugh!" he exclaimed, taking Hugh's other arm. "I couldn't wait. There's something in me that rebels against your churches. I feel the same way about mosques and synagogues, for that matter. And as for being buried down in a close, stone-lined hole in the ground, herded in with other dead"—he shivered violently—"I hope not! If there is a God—and there must be some kind of one to make the trees

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and the hills and the grass and to put music in one's heart—why, I pray to Him that I shall lie on a hillside, with only the trees round me and the sun beating down."

Hugh smiled.

"Each to his own, Nikka. You are a Gipsy, a son of the open road. I am an Englishman, son to these stone walls, that old house we came from. I cannot get away from it. So long as they and I last, we shall be indivisible."

"And what am I?" I demanded lightly.

"You? You are an American. The world is your oyster. You can be satisfied in any way—in Nikka's way or in mine."

It was a scant ten minutes' walk through the park to Castle Chesby. As we entered the drive, Watkins, who had driven back with the servants, came round the house from the stables and started to run toward us.

"Somebody broke in while we were at church, your ludship," he panted, when he was within ear-shot.

We were all startled.

"Anything missing?" questioned Hugh.

"I can't say as yet, your ludship. They seem to 'ave been only in the unoccupied parts. I fancy, sir, they 'adn't the time to go through the west wing."

We hastened into the house after him. A rear door in the center of the castle—it was really more of a manor than a castle in style—had been forced. Desks, wardrobes, chests of drawers, closets, armoires, every corner or piece of furniture that might conceal anything had been thoroughly ransacked. Sometimes drawers and their contents were piled helter-skelter on the floor.

"Do you suppose they could have found anything?" I asked.

Watkins shook his head positively.

"I am sure they could not, Mr. Nash, sir. I think I know most of the stuff that they have gone through. Oh, in a very general way, your ludship, to be sure. But I am sure 'is late ludship was not in the 'abit of keeping anything he was precious of in the east wing or the main 'ouse, sir."

We left Watkins to supervise the servants in reestablishing order in the upset rooms and returned to the west wing. In the gun-room Hugh lit a cigarette and straddled his legs in front of the fire. Nikka and I dropped into the lounge that faced the hearth.

"Well?" said Hugh, and his lips resumed the grim line I had noticed in church.

"Who are they?" I suggested.

Hugh rang the bell by the door. Watkins arrived with the celerity of a jinnee.

"Watty, I wish you'd make inquiries along the roads and find out if any strangers have been seen round the place this morning. Oh, yes—and tell the servants not to talk. You understand? Not to talk. The man or woman who talks is to be dismissed."

"That was a good idea," said Nikka. "Our best bet is to keep our mouths shut. They, whoever 'they' are, have us guessing. Maybe we can make them guess a little. And that reminds me—do you realize that they have saved us quite a bit of searching?"

"You mean in turning two-thirds of the house upside down?" asked Hugh.

"Just that. And I'd suggest that we waste no time in going thoroughly over this wing ourselves."

We set to work with gusto. On my suggestion—they nominated me captain in this enterprise because of my supposed architectural knowledge—we began with the gun-room, examined it from end to end, tapped the paneling for secret recesses, probed the furniture. No result.

After luncheon we mounted to the upper floor and went over the entire wing in detail. We measured the different rooms. I even took outer measurements. We studied chimneys. We sounded floors. We took to pieces every article of furniture which might have concealed a secret drawer—and we found several hidden receptacles, by the way, but they contained nothing beyond ordinary family letters and trash. Immersed in the hunt and baffled by lack of success, we caused Watkins to put off dinner and worked on until after nine o'clock. Still no success.

WE WENT to bed that night tired out and disgusted. But in the morning we rose with sharpened interest and determined to canvass the possibilities in the parts of the house the invaders had searched. We hunted for two days. Then we went back and reexamined the west wing a second time. We ended up in

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stark disappointment in the gun-room.

"Damn it all!" ripped Hugh. "The trouble is that my family were not Catholics in the times when priests were proscribed and every self-respecting Catholic family had its priest's hole."

"I'm not worried just because your family can't boast an accessible hiding-place," I retorted. "What bothers me is that their hiding-place, if they have one, is so cunningly hidden we can't find it."

"If they have one," repeated Hugh. "You may well say that! I am beginning to believe we may be on a wild-goose chase, after all."

"If we were the only ones after it, I might think so," I replied.

Nikka, who had relapsed into one of his frequent spells of silent contemplation, jumped suddenly from his chair.

"If it is here, it is in this room," he said.

"Is that a Gipsy prophecy?" jeered Hugh.

There was a racket of motors outside in the drive, and Watkins appeared.

"Pardon, your ludship. But I thought you would wish to know Mr. Hilyer and 'is party 'ave just driven up."

"The devil they have!" exclaimed Hugh. "I suppose we'll have to see 'em." But Watkins lingered in the doorway. "What is it?"

Watkins cleared his throat.

"You may remember you instructed me to inquire if strangers 'ad been seen on the roads 'ereabout, your ludship—the morning of the funeral, your ludship."

Hugh nodded.

"Mrs. Dobson at the lodge said nobody passed on the village road, your ludship. And I made other inquiries, but nobody I spoke to 'ad seen anything until I met 'Iggins, the carpenter, sir, this morning. 'E said one of Mr. Hilyer's motors passed on the London road close on noon, but that was all."

"Well, that doesn't help any," said Hugh. "Whoever did it must have taken to the woods and cut across to the Channel road."

"They need only 'ave dropped over the park wall to reach the London road, your ludship," suggested Watkins.

"Ah! I see your point," agreed Hugh. "Then Hilyer's people might have seen them. I'll find an opportunity to speak to him about it."

"Thank you, your ludship."

And Watkins withdrew, but presently reappeared, to announce,

"Mr. and Mrs. Hilyer, your ludship!"

And never in my life—except the time he bobbed up out of the drain—have I seen anything more splendid than the emotionless disapproval with which Watkins was able to invest his countenance as he announced our callers.

HILYER was a lean, rangy chap, with a hatchet-face and close-set eyes. His mustache was waxed in the Continental fashion, and he had slim, powerful hands, the hands of a born horseman and gambler. He looked what he was—good blood gone wrong.

His wife was a handsome, statuesque woman, awfully well turned out. She was absolutely in the mode, as perfect as a show-girl in a Gaiety production. And she had cold eyes that saw everything, and never lost their icy glitter, even when her manner was warmest.

"Hello, Hugh!" exclaimed Hilyer. "Frightfully glad to see you home again, but rotten sorry for the occasion! You don't know Mrs. Hilyer, I believe?"

Hugh bowed to her with cold precision.

"Thanks, Hilyer!"—just a shade of emphasis on the family name. "It was kind of you to come. We are keeping bachelors' hall, Mrs. Hilyer, and I am afraid our entertaining-resources are limited."

"Don't let that bother you," protested Mrs. Hilyer affably, "and if you and your friends want any lively diversion on the quiet, remember we keep Liberty Hall over at Little Depping. We wanted our——"

But I lost the thread of her conversation as I found myself staring into those same evil green eyes that I had seen peering out of the shadows of the Hilyer pew the morning of the funeral. The man they belonged to had entered the room immediately after the Hilyers. He would have challenged attention in any company with his amazing personality. He had the long arms, short, thick legs and enormous body of a gorilla, capped by a beautifully modeled head. His forehead was high; his clean-shaven face was very white; his jaw was square without being prognathous. But his eyes were his outstanding feature. They were large and vividly green.

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The man baffled you. The expression of his face was dreamy, preoccupied. He had the appearance of a thinker, a recluse. But underneath this outward seeming I sensed another self lurking as if in ambush. He was handsome in an intellectual way. Yet I found him repulsive.

Hilyer, undeterred by Hugh's frosty greeting, dropped his hand on this man's shoulder and began introducing him. He let his hand lie there only a minute and then almost snatched it away.

"Signor Teodoreschi, gentlemen! The Italian chemist. And my other friends, Countess Sandra Vassilievna and Count Serge Vassilivich. I ought to explain they are brother and sister." This last with a well-bred leer. "And Hilmi Bey, gentlemen. If you knew your Levant, you would recognize him without introduction."

I saw Nikka shift his attention at this from the two Russians to the Levantine, an olive-skinned individual, good-looking in a portly way, with a predatory beaked nose, effeminate eyes and a sensual mouth.

"You see we're rather an international crowd—what?" Mrs. Hilyer was drawling. "Matter of fact, Lord Chesby, we might muster another race or two."

"Very interesting, I'm sure," said Hugh, cold as ever. "You won't mind if I present my friends to you as a group? Thanks. This is Mr. Zaranko—and Mr. Nash."

"Not Mr. Nikka Zaranko?" exclaimed Mrs. Hilyer, "Oh, I say; it is a treat to meet you! How wonderfully you play!"

And she wrenched Nikka away from his obvious intent to probe the Levantine and carried him off to a corner, along with Vassilivich, a slim-waisted, old-young man, with a hard, dissipated face.

HILMI, after a look round, joined the gorilla-like Italian, who was turning the pages of a review on the table, with occasional flashing glances about the room. Monty Hilyer was volubly describing the prospects of the racing-season to Hugh, and I was left by process of elimination to entertain the Countess Sandra Vassilievna.

I think both Hugh and Nikka envied me the chance. She was a dark girl, with great, sleepy, almond-shaped eyes and a sinuous, willowy figure.

"You're an American, aren't you?" she said, with a very slight accent. "And how did you happen to know Lord Chesby?"

I explained to her.

"He went to New York to earn his living? Ah, that is an old story, Mr. Nash. Look at my brother and me! Exiles! Forced to turn our hands to whatever we can do. The Old World is a sad place these days."

I felt like telling her that I didn't believe it would hurt her sort to do a little work, but, instead, I asked her what she did do.

"Oh, anything," she replied evasively. "Secretarial work when I can get it. And you? But I suppose you will help Lord Chesby enjoy the life of an English country gentleman."

"For a while, yes," I agreed.

"And then?"

"I don't know. America, I suppose. One must earn a living."

"So you would leave him—Lord Chesby, I mean?"

I began to have a disagreeable feeling that I was being pumped.

"I can't stay here forever, you know," I retorted.

"Ah, but of course! And Lord Chesby? Will he marry an heiress, an American, perhaps? But no! He does not need money, they say."

"They say a great many things," I commented.

"It may be he did ill to leave America," she suggested. "One is so safe there. In Europe, who can say what the future holds? Russia in chaos. Turkey torn by war. Eastern Europe boiling. Germany thirsting for vengeance. Ah, Mr. Nash, were I an American, I should stay at home."

"That sounds almost like a threat."

"God forbid!" she ejaculated, with true Russian piety. "It is that I envy you your security. All Serge and I can do is to wait and plot and plot and wait."

"Are you staying in England?" I asked.

"Only temporarily. We shall be in Paris shortly. Perhaps you would care to call when you ——"

"I haven't any present intention of going to Paris," I cut in.

"I can't believe you," she replied. "Don't all good Americans expect to go to Paris when they die? Perhaps you will travel elsewhere—no?" I shrugged my shoulders. "You Americans are so venturesome."

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I happened to look up at that moment and surprised the Italian in one of his lightning surveys of the room.

"Your friend there seems exclusive?" I remarked.

"Oh, he?" she said hastily. "He speaks no English, and he is sensitive about it."

Hilmi Bey left the Italian's side and sauntered over to us.

"A beautiful old room," he said. "Has it any history?"

"It's the oldest part of the present building," I told him. "I understand it represents a reconstruction during Elizabeth's reign."

"Ah! Faultless taste, isn't it?" He swung round on me. "They tell me you are an architect. You must appreciate such a good job."

The fellow spoke very pleasantly, and yet there was something about him that roused in me a desire to punch his face.

"You can't beat the old people who worked slowly and lovingly," I answered, forcing myself to be civil.

"That is a gorgeous fireplace," said the countess.

"Ah, yes," Hilmi agreed, with his absurdly broad pronunciation. "Rather a quaint verse there, too, I see. How does it run?"

He picked it out slowly, with some help from the Russian girl:

> "Whenne thatte ye Pappist Churchmanne
> Woudde seke Hys Soul's Contente
> Hee tookened up ye Wysshinge Stone
> And trodde ye Prior's Vent.

"Deuced odd! What does it all mean?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," I said. "Nor has anybody else. It seems like a gratuitous slap at a certain religion, and as the author of the lines was noted for her religious bias, that is probably as good an explanation as any other."

OUR conversation had attracted the attention of the others, and Mrs. Hilyer drew Nikka and the count in front of the chimneypiece.

"You don't suppose there could be some secret meaning to those words, do you?" she asked.

"I wish you'd pick it out for me," I countered.

"A key to something else, you know," she went on. "Our ancestors were fond of that sort of thing. They loved mystery, and life wasn't as safe in those days as it is in our's."

"It's perfectly thrilling!" cried the countess. "This is just the kind of room to house some wonderful secret—or perhaps a tragedy."

"At any rate, her meaning is successfully concealed," I said. "Always supposing she had a meaning."

I felt something behind me and turned my head. The Italian had left the table in the center of the room and moved up to the fringe of our group. His green eyes, flaring with an uncanny vital force, were intent upon the rime on the overmantel.

"Humph," I thought to myself. "You may not be able to speak English, but you appear to be able to read it."

He growled something in an undertone to Mrs. Hilyer, and she nodded.

"Fascinating as your room is, I am afraid we must leave you, Lord Chesby," she called over to Hugh. "Signor Teodoreschi has just reminded me we have to put him on the London train before we drive home."

"I'll have your motors called up," returned Hugh impassively, as he and Hilyer joined the rest of us.

He rang and gave the necessary orders to Watkins.

"You really must come over and have a bit of bridge with us," Mrs. Hilyer bowled along merrily. "Of course, I know you are in mourning, but, even so, you ought not to deny yourself all pleasure. Any evening at all. Do make it soon. So glad to have met you, Mr. Zaranko! I can't tell you how sorry I am you won't play for us. Mr. Nash, I've hardly had a word with you, but we'll better that over at Little Depping, sha'n't we?"

The countess extended her hand to me.

"I hope you will accept Mrs. Hilyer's invitation," she said, her eyes glowing softly. "It's such a pleasure to meet Americans. I'd love to ride with you one day this week."

"I'll ring you up," I prevaricated, feeling very much like doing it if the truth be known—she had a way with her, that girl.

"And don't forget that tip on Krugersdorp for the St. Leger," I heard Hilyer insist to Hugh. "I'm not so sure about the Derby. When you run over to see us, I'll let you have a look at a sweet little

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filly I'm grooming for steeplechase work. You aren't taking on any hunters, are you? I've——"

"By the way," Hugh interrupted. "I meant to ask you: Did any of your people see strangers round here the morning of my uncle's funeral?"

I was amazed at the sudden silence that gripped the room. The Italian, Teodoreschi, already in the doorway after a curt nod of farewell, stopped dead and stared hard at Hugh.

"You see," Hugh continued, "I heard one of your cars was seen on the London road in back of the park, and if——"

"But, my dear fellow," exclaimed Hilyer, "what's the trouble? There are always strangers passing through Chesby. You've got two trunk highways, remember."

"Quite so," agreed Hugh. "But I'm anxious to know whether any strangers were seen that morning—especially strangers on foot."

"Not that we've heard of," responded Mrs. Hilyer promptly. "All of us were at the funeral. And if the servants had noticed anything queer, I'm sure they would have reported it to me."

"Thanks!" said Hugh. "Would it be too much trouble for you to inquire of them just the same?"

"Not at all. Do you mind telling us what happened?"

The whole company crowded closer.

"Oh, nothing much," answered Hugh deliberately, "except we had reason to suppose the house had been entered."

"Great Scott!" protested Hilyer. "That's a go! We've never had anything like that before in the county. But with so many men out of work, and the unrest and what-not, I suppose it's no more than to be expected."

"Did you lose anything, Lord Chesby?" inquired Hilmi Bey.

"I think not."

The Countess Sandra Vassilievna permitted an artistic shudder to undulate her figure.

"*Bozhe moi*, Maude!" she cried. "Do you bring us into your rural England to risk death from burglars? I prefer the Bolshevists."

Several laughed.

"All the same, it's no joke," answered Mrs. Hilyer. "Thanks for the warning, Lord Chesby. We'll let the dogs loose round the house after this at night."

Teodoreschi, still standing in the doorway, rasped a single sentence and passed out. The others flocked after him like hounds over whom the huntsman cracks his whip. Mrs. Hilyer and the countess waved a last good-by, and Watkins closed the door on them.

NIKKA and I looked at one another and burst out laughing. Hugh, with a muffled curse, threw up the nearest window.

"Let's have some fresh air," he said. "That scoundrel, Monty Hilyer, makes me feel dirty. He and his tips! And we must come over and play bridge! Yes; and roulette, too, I suppose, with a wired wheel. I say, you two—do I look like such an utter ass?"

"They were a queer crowd," I admitted. "That countess wasn't bad-looking, though."

"I noticed you stuck to her," insinuated Hugh.

"Nonsense! She singled me out. I think she was trying to pump me."

"Well, Hilyer didn't ask me any questions, I'm bound to say," returned Hugh. "He was too busy with his beastly gambling anecdotes and crooked dope. What did you make out of them, Nikka?"

Nikka lit a cigarette before he replied.

"I think they are a party of polite thieves," he answered at last. "At least, some of them. The Italian I made nothing of."

"He didn't talk any," said Hugh.

"They said he couldn't speak English," I put in.

"You didn't notice, then, that he was listening to everything that was said?" observed Nikka.

"No; but I saw him read the rime up there over the fireplace. He gave me the shakes."

"Who was the bey person?" inquired Hugh.

Nikka's lip curled.

"That fellaheen cur? I know the breed. They live by graft and worse. If we go to Paris, I think I shall make inquiries about some of them. I know persons at the Prefecture of Police who ought to have their *dossiers*."

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"That is a gorgeous fireplace," said the countess. "Ah, yes," Hilmi agreed, with his absurdly broad pronunciation. "Rather a quaint verse there, too, I see. How does it run?"

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We fell silent as Watkins, the company out of the way, brought in tea.

"How did they get on the subject of that verse of Lady Jane's?" demanded Hugh suddenly.

"It was the countess and Mrs. Hilyer," I explained. "They saw it, and insisted on reading some hidden meaning into it."

AS I spoke I looked up again at the overmantel, where the Gothic characters showed dimly in the light from the smoldering logs and the rays of the sunset. I conned over the four lines deliberately. "Ye Prior's Vent." The last three words seemed to jump out at me. "Some secret meaning. A key to something else, you know." Mrs. Hilyer's phrases reechoed in my brain. I studied the rime a second time.

"Hugh," I said suddenly, "do you happen to have with you the copy of that other verse of Lady Jane's?"

He produced it from his pocketbook without speaking. We had read over the copy of the instructions a score of times since our arrival at Chesby, but none of us had recurred to Lady Jane's whimsical effort.

I spread the copy before me:

Putte downe ye Anciount riddel
In Decente, Seemelie ordour.
Rouse, O ye mystick Sybil,
Vex Hymme who doth Endeavour,
Nor treate Hys efortte tendour.

And in the winking of an eyelid the cipher leaped out before me. I did not reason it out. It just came to me—when I saw the "V E" in the next to the last line, I think.

"I've got it!" I shouted, and I sprang up and danced across the hearth, waving the paper in my hand. "I've got it!"

Hugh and Nikka regarded me in astonishment.

"Got what, you silly ass?" asked Hugh.

"It—the secret! The key! The cipher! The treas—" But even as I started to say that, I thought better of it. "No; that's going too far," I panted, breaking off in my mad dance. "I've got something, but how much it means is another matter."

Hugh pulled me down beside them.

"Talk sense, Jack," he ordered. "Show us your——"

"Here!" I shoved the copy of Lady Jane's doggerel in front of him and Nikka. "Now watch!"

I took a pencil and drew it through all except the first letters of the first and last words in each line. So:

P——————————r——
I——————————o——
R——————————S——
V——————————E——
N——————————t——

The result, of course, was:

P	r
I	o
R	S
V	E
N	t

"Prior's vent!" gasped Nikka. "He *has* found something!"

And his eyes, too, sought the verse carved on the overmantel.

"Up there, too! It can mean only one thing."

"That the secret to the location of the treasure is in the prior's vent," I added triumphantly.

"Or can be reached through the prior's vent," amended Nikka.

Hugh, who had been in a brown study, roused himself and peered at the mass of the fireplace.

"I'm not trying to belittle Jack's discovery," he said slowly, "but you chaps must remember that we don't know where or what the prior's vent is."

"Except that you may take it for certain it is in this room," replied Nikka.

"And that perhaps the fireplace has something to do with it," I suggested.

Hugh shook his head.

"No, no, Jack; that won't wash. You yourself have measured that chimney-area, and we all agreed there wasn't space inside it for a secret chamber. If I thought there was, I'd tear it down."

"Hold on!" counseled Nikka. "Easy does it. For the first time we've got something to go upon. Let's chew it over for a while and see what we can make of it."

We chewed it over until bedtime without reaching any decision.

The three friends find a good deal more to occupy themselves with during the night than dreaming over Nash's discovery. See the next instalment in June EVERYBODY'S—out May 15th.

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Enter "The Fixer"

Another Chapter from New York's Picturesque Underworld Life, Taken from the Note-Book of a Well-Known Newspaper Man

By William C. McCloy

Author of "The Rise of Spotty Lafitte," etc.

THINGS were breaking badly for Jeffreys, Joseph P., clerk—the name and designation he used on the voting-lists both up-town and down-town. It should be said at the start that Jeffreys didn't insist on this name and designation. There were times when he was willing to drop them both—and frequently did—for a name and a vocation suited to the work he was engaged in at the moment. Not young was Jeffreys, though always well and youthfully dressed. At a distance, the cut of his clothes, his hat set square on his head and pulled down to his ears gave him the appearance of being about twenty-four, but closer inspection showed the lines time and his varying fortunes—or misfortunes—had plowed in his smooth-shaven, dark, saturnine face and indicated that these figures should be reversed. His eyes were small and deep-set, and, through a trick of half dropping his eyelids when he talked, their color was uncertain. But there was nothing uncertain about the expression of those eyes. A brief, disastrous career upon the stage in his youth had taught him how to use them, as it had helped him in playing the parts his ever-changing opportunities offered. In general, his manner was quiet and subdued, in keeping with a vocation to which publicity and a permanent name were serious drawbacks.

Among his familiars, Jeffreys was known as "The Fixer." His real business was to arrange matters so that they would inure to the advantage of the men who employed him. He was not particular as to the character of these clients—indeed, those who had no character at all or who were in serious trouble with the law were preferred; they naturally yielded greater profit. At incredibly short notice Jeffreys could produce witnesses who were present when an accident occurred, experienced operators to assist in conducting a robbery from the inside, and, if he had time, he could build as finished and as artistic an alibi as was ever laid before a court—one that was calculated to draw a jury to "a reasonable doubt" as surely as a magnet draws a needle.

For more than six weeks, now, Jeffreys had been without a single paying case. He attributed this to the laxity of the police. Novices in robberies went boldly about their business without consulting expert fixers. The men the police had gathered in were the proletariat of robberdom—the kind that sought clemency through societies, political captains and aldermen, unprofessional and honest "fixers," who worked without pay. Some idea of Jeffreys' present financial stringency may be gained from the fact that he had been compelled to accept the place of a special policeman at a boxing-bout or forego the entertainment altogether. He realized that unless something happened—and soon—to put him in funds, he would have to go to work. But this humiliation he was spared.

At the general-post-office window down-town he ran into a friend. This friend, in a dusty, dark corner of the ugly old Federal Building, told him of a man who wanted a robbery arranged. The friend

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apologetically explained that the job was outside his own vocation as a "dip," but was just in Jeffreys' line. The friend did more. He offered to arrange an interview. Jeffreys accepted at once, and the two went to a telephone-booth. After a moment's talk, the friend put his hand over the mouthpiece and asked,

"What name'll you use?"

Jeffreys drew out his card-case, scanned a half-dozen cards and selected one for the occasion.

"Archibald D. Kennedy, consulting architect," he said.

The friend repeated the name, listened an instant and hung up the receiver.

"He'll see you at six. Good luck!"

The preliminaries having been arranged, Jeffreys strolled up Broadway for half an hour, turning into a side-street and looking up at second-story windows until he found the sign he sought. A glance at his watch showed him he was twenty minutes too early. He wandered about the neighborhood until six o'clock. Then he made his way up a dark stairway to The Whynot Silk Company. To his practised eye it was plain that the company had not been there very long.

A short, thick-set man, dark and with a heavy brown mustache—the only person in sight—came forward.

"Mr. Stuyvesant—he expects me," said Jeffreys. "I'm Mr. Kennedy, the architect."

The Fixer took out his card-case, but the man, who evidently had been expecting him, without waiting for a card motioned him to follow and led the way to an office in the rear. As Jeffreys entered, he saw there was a single dim light, so arranged that the occupant would be able to see the caller much better than the caller could see him. But Jeffreys made out a broad-shouldered man, apparently of middle height, with gray hair and a stubby beard, also gray, and a short, blunt nose—so blunt that it gave the impression of being not quite finished and indicated pugnacity rather than penetration. The man motioned Jeffreys to a seat and said at once,

"How much did he tell you?"

"Nothing more than, for reasons of your own, you wished to intercept a wagon-load of silk on its way to New York and divert it to another address."

"How many boffos to pull the trick?"

"How many men on the wagon?"

"Two—one in on the deal."

"I'll need two others—one thousand each—two thousand for myself."

"Too much."

"Not when you consider that the one not in the deal may insist on making one of us a doctor's patient."

"I don't want any noise about it. Only the one in on the deal will be armed."

"But they will resist—even the one who is on will have to make a show. We'll have to bind both and leave them in the woods. You want the silk brought here?"

"Perhaps; but you are a bit too boffy."

"Not for a good, clean job. I'm always successful—no aftermaths."

"You don't talk like an expert."

Jeffreys dropped his eyelids a shade lower. The remark indicated that it was Mr. Stuyvesant's first venture. Plainly suspicious and nervous, his studied use of words he regarded as thieves' *argot* confirmed this. Jeffreys sought to allay his fears.

"My men do. I'm The Fixer. And first-class fixers use good English in dealing with—gentlemen."

The man hesitated a moment. Then he said slowly and cautiously:

"I want to think about it further. Come back in a week—same time."

The Fixer rose and departed.

AN HOUR and a half later, Jeffreys stood at the gate of the Eureka Athletic Club, keeping order among the crowd of men and boys who were eagerly trying to enter, and loudly calling out at intervals:

"Don't crowd, gentlemen; don't crowd! There's plenty of time—plenty of time—and room for all who have tickets."

Presently two young men reached the entrance at the same instant, each making an effort to enter before the other.

"Don't crowd me!" cried the taller of the two sharply. "I was here ahead of you."

Jeffreys looked at him, then at the other, who was of middle height, broad-shouldered, with a short, blunt nose—like Stuyvesant's.

"Not on your life, you big goof!" was the pugnacious reply of the younger man.

"Say that again, and I'll knock——"

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The taller man didn't finish. Jeffreys stepped between the two, put a hand on the chest of each man, and said, with a laugh,

"Now, boys; now, boys—be good and break nicely." Then he kicked the gate open wider and added: "There you are! Both go in first."

The two angry men caught the humor of the remark, grinned and passed in, walking off together, talking gaily.

Jeffreys quickly put a hand in each of the side pockets of his coat. He was in funds now, for when he placed his hands on the chests of the two angry young men, he had improved the opportunity by lifting the pin from each man's tie. Just how much he was in funds he didn't know, but he was able to guess when he was summoned to the office during the main bout and found the younger man, who had reminded him of Stuyvesant, waiting there.

"Fixer, this gentleman has lost his pin. Did you notice any of the queer ones here to-night?" asked his chief.

"There were three or four. I wish I had stopped them."

"I don't want any noise about it—" began the young man. Jeffreys had heard that same remark a few hours before. He looked at the youth narrowly. "But I'll give two hundred berries to get that pin back—no questions asked," went on the youth.

"I'll see if I can fix it," said Jeffreys. "Describe the pin."

"A sapphire surrounded by a square of diamonds."

"If I locate it, where can I find you?"

"Any time during the day—at the Bursley Silk Mills, Kensington, New Jersey. Just ask for George W. Bursley."

Jeffreys wrote down the address. And, true to habit, dropped his eyelids until the eyes were almost closed as he studied young Bursley intently.

Young Bursley returned the look boldly and asked,

"If I wait here a while, do you think there is a chance that you can locate it?"

"No; I may have to comb a half-dozen."

"If I don't hear from you in a couple of days, where can I reach you?"

The Fixer took out his card-case. The card that came first to hand was that of Archibald D. Kennedy, consulting architect, which he had placed forward for immediate use a few hours before. For a minute, a flash of humor prompted him to present this same card. Then a quick second thought of possible complications guided him to the next, that of Richard A. Quinn, consulting detective. He quickly wrote on this card the address: East One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street.

Bursley pocketed the card and passed out. Jeffreys looked after him and thought: "More silk! I thought Stuyvesant's whiskers looked phony, but it was too dark for me to be sure. And that fighting-nose! I surely will have a look at that silk-mill."

SAFE outside the office, Jeffreys examined the pin. He was puzzled at the value the young man placed on it. It didn't seem to him to be worth more than one hundred dollars at most, but when he turned it over and read the inscription, "To G. from L.," he understood, and there was no doubt about the young man's pleasure when he received the pin the next afternoon as he and Jeffreys stood at the outer rail in the office of Silas Bursley & Company's silk-mills.

"I hurried over as soon as I got it," said The Fixer affably. "I knew you were anxious about it. You see, I knew all the dips that passed me—there were six of them, and, of course, it was the last one I found that had it. It's always that way."

"I was sure you would get it quickly," said Bursley dryly, though not until he had the pin safely in his hand.

Jeffreys hardly heard this remark. With lowered eyelids he was intent upon studying the face before him and thinking of Mr. Stuyvesant.

Bursley drew out his wallet and began counting out the two hundred dollars. A man—about Bursley's age, and not unlike him—passed, looked at them sharply and crossed to an office on the other side of the room. An instant later, through his half-closed eyes, Jeffreys saw a much older man appear at the doorway of this office. Jeffreys started—an unusual thing—but this elderly man not only bore a strong family likeness to young Bursley but his short, stubby beard and gray hair, as well as that blunt, unfinished nose, were even more like Mr. Stuyvesant's. The elderly man spoke sharply to a boy, who hurried over to Bursley.

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"Mr. Silas wants to see you at once," said the boy.

Bursley flushed, nodded quickly to Jeffreys and hastened away. As he passed out, Jeffreys asked the boy at the door,

"Who's the man with the gray beard?"

The boy grinned.

"Old Silas. George'll get a panning for having a sporting man come here."

It was The Fixer's turn to grin.

"The old guy—picking up a little burglary insurance," he thought. "I'll bet I've lost that job now—still, I've got two hundred to go on."

And he was right. When he called at The Whynot Silk Company's loft a week later, the thick-set dark man said,

"Mr. Stuyvesant has been called out of town suddenly and won't be back for a month or two."

NONE but Jeffreys' most intimate friends knew where he lived. He had chosen a neighborhood—upper Lexington Avenue, a short walk from One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, where no one—not even the police—would expect to find a man of his character. All his business was done elsewhere. He rarely rose before noon. For ten years he had gone to the same unpretentious restaurant on the same Harlem street for breakfast, first stopping at a little stationery store close by to get his mail, to which all was sent, no matter what name he was using at the time. Early in January, 1920, a fortnight after he had been told Mr. Stuyvesant had gone out of town, he went to the restaurant as usual for his breakfast, picking up a morning newspaper on the way. There was news of much interest to him that morning. The boxing-bouts in aid of devastated France had been held at Madison Square Garden the night before, and lack of funds had kept him away.

As he sat down at the table, he opened his paper and saw an item of still greater interest that made him forget all about the bouts. The account was brief. Just before midnight, the safe of Silas Bursley & Company's silk-mills, at Kensington, New Jersey, had been rifled of twenty thousand dollars. The watchman, assaulted, bound and gagged by two masked men, had managed to free himself about one o'clock in the morning and had telephoned for assistance. Jeffreys had almost forgotten the existence of the silk-mills—and Mr. Stuyvesant. He dropped the paper in his lap and thought.

"The old fellow decided to go it alone," he muttered. "Still, I ought to horn in somewhere—on what I know."

He called a waiter and asked for all the afternoon papers. He ran over them. Their accounts were fuller. He read these slowly, piecing together the various bits of information that each had separately. When he had finished, he decided to keep clear of it entirely. Mr. Stuyvesant had blundered in leaving a blood-stained glove behind him. The Fixer had the contemptuous feeling the professional always feels for an amateur who has blundered. The watchman had been struck from behind and could give no description; but that glove!

During the next three days, Jeffreys read the accounts of the robbery as they unfolded like a serial story. The watchman's alarm had brought old Silas to the mills first, followed by his son Lemuel, but there had been some difficulty in rousing the nephew, George. The papers laid undue stress on this at first, Jeffreys thought, but they made the reason clear the next day by stating that the glove belonged to George, and added that the police expected to make an arrest in a day or two. This turn surprised and puzzled Jeffreys. He was still more surprised and puzzled on the third day when he read that George stubbornly refused to say where he was on the night of the robbery—and then the brief-case containing the money when it was put in the safe had been found under the mattress of George's bed when his rooms were searched by the detectives.

"And I thought it was the old guy himself—but it was the kid, after all—made up with the old man's beard and hair," said Jeffreys to himself.

After the arrest of George, his arraignment in the police court and his admittance to bail, the public interest was transferred to fresher robberies and the story was dropped from the papers. But Jeffreys' personal interest was renewed suddenly when as Richard A. Quinn, consulting detective, he received an urgent note asking him to call at once to see Thomas R. Matthews, attorney, Kensington, New Jersey.

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He knew that it had something to do with the robbery, and his first impulse was to ignore it. A second consideration brought the thought that the "extreme necessities" "great trouble," "desperate situation" indicated a liberal remuneration, though he realized that his ability to "fix things" in New Jersey was somewhat limited. But the low state of his finances called for serious action at once.

AS HE he neared the office of the attorney, Matthews, Jeffreys saw the two Bursleys, father and son, come out. He waited for them to get out of sight before he entered Matthews' office. He found him an alert, straightforward youth, hardly more than twenty-two, greatly impressed with the importance of the case he had in hand.

"Mr. Quinn," began Matthews abruptly, "Mr. Bursley—Mr. George Bursley, my client—thinks you can help him. He says you are a shrewd New York consulting detective. I'll say frankly I've looked into your record, and I'm not so—convinced as he is. I tell you frankly, as a reputable member of the bar, I won't stand for anything—queer."

The Fixer smiled. He had heard this sort of thing from older and more experienced lawyers than this boy—at the start. He knew—none better—the value of vehement protestations of probity among criminal lawyers.

Matthews went on:

"The worst of it is, Bursley won't tell—even me, his friend and attorney—where he was up to twelve o'clock on the night of the robbery. I think he has nothing worse to tell than that he was at a prize-fight. You see, his uncle, Silas Bursley, abhors such things. George won the amateur light-weight title when we were at the university together, and it turned his head on boxing. He's always stealing off to see a bout, even in the face of a threat of his uncle to throw him out—to discharge him. Now, you can help a whole lot—I believe you met him at a bout—if you can drag out of him just where he was. You'll be liberally paid—in the end. He's in there alone."

"Didn't I see the two Bursleys coming out a few minutes ago?" asked Jeffreys.

"Yes; old Silas—he's as hard as nails—was persuaded by his son—and Lem's as white as they make 'em—to come here and tell George he would let up if he would confess. But George won't. He swears he didn't do it. He wouldn't even talk about where he was on the night. They both went away angry. George always was pig-headed and stubborn—like all natural fighters."

"He has a fighting-nose," ventured Jeffreys.

"They all have—the Bursley nose," replied Matthews. "Suppose you have a try at him; but nothing funny goes—bear that in mind."

Jeffreys, suppressing a desire to smile, passed into the other room silently—so silently that George, who was seated with his head in his hands, did not hear him enter.

"I see, Mr. Stuyvesant," began Jeffreys lightly, "you decided to go it alone. That was foolish."

George looked up in a puzzled way and repeated,

"Mr. Stuyvesant?"

The Fixer laughed.

"You're good on the baby-stare. But go ahead—we'll say you never heard of Stuyvesant, but I don't think I can do much in Jersey—of all places. Why didn't you stick to New York? It's safer."

"I don't understand a word you're saying!" exclaimed George. "I'm innocent."

"Sure you are! Keep right on saying it."

"Aren't you a detective?"

"Just as sure as you are innocent, I am."

"Well then, I want to hire you to untie this knot."

"It will cost you something."

"I know—but I'm going to spend everything I've got to clear myself." The Fixer's face brightened. "How much will you want to undertake it? asked George.

"Fifty-fifty."

"Fifty-fifty? I don't get you."

"For half of the twenty thousand dollars I can fix up the neatest alibi you ever saw."

"I didn't get the money!" cried George indignantly.

"Of course I know that. But I don't see how I can help you for less."

"Go on," said George desperately.

The Fixer paused a moment.

"Let's talk square," he said finally. "Keep nothing back."

George, after a moment's hesitation, went on:

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"Well, I will. When I got my pin back so quickly, I suspected you."

"Really—did you? I'm shocked at your want of confidence in me. I ought to resent that by refusing the job, but I won't be sensitive with you—an old friend. The watchman says the robbery occurred before twelve. For ten thousand dollars I'll get ten men who saw you in New York on the night of the robbery—one of them quarreled with you—going into the boxing-show—just as you did on the night the dip got your pin. Two others saw the quarrelling and stopped a fight. Two others—one sat on each side of you at the boxing-bouts for devastated France——"

"No—no, not that—not for anything!" cried the boy excitedly.

"Why not?" The Fixer's question came sharply. There was no use of his hanging round if they were not willing to fix things.

George looked hard at him, and Jeffreys remembered Matthews' warning. A light came to him that interested him. The boy was at the bouts—and Jeffreys remembered with a pang that he himself had only seen them on a ticker—but why should young Bursley want to keep a little thing like that a secret at such a time? This was beyond Jeffreys' comprehension. Though greatly mystified, The Fixer ventured:

"You know you were there. What's wrong in admitting that?"

George breathed hard.

"How do you know?"

"I saw you. That's what made me suggest the alibi. I saw you come in. I was at the gate further along."

"Then you know—why I can't tell—" Young Bursley stopped.

A smile came to The Fixer's face—an inscrutable smile. There was only one reason why this kid—why any kid—would be willing to suffer when he might clear himself so easily. There was a girl somewhere in the background, and for some reason which he couldn't understand she had to be protected. He decided to venture a second guess.

"It's bound to come out—at the public trial. Think how much worse it will be for the girl then——"

Bursley jumped to his feet.

"It must not! I thought you—with your cun—shrewdness would be able to find a way out—without my telling where I was."

Jeffreys smiled. "You can't help me—without my telling you that?" asked George anxiously.

"How about that glove? How did it get there?" returned Jeffreys, lowering his voice.

"I don't know," replied George vaguely. "It was my glove—I had left it in my desk."

"And the brief-case—in the bed?"

"The police must be lying. I didn't put it there. I've thought it was just a police trick to make me say something. Can't you—with all your experience in such things—find out?"

"Let me think about it for a couple of days—I'll let you know—or Matthews."

LEAVING George seated alone, staring before him, The Fixer passed out. He was puzzled, amused and interested. It was a new rôle for him—this of proving a really innocent man innocent. One way or another, he had proved many a guilty man not guilty, but he had never had an entirely innocent client before. He walked to Matthews' desk.

"Any idea where he was?" asked Matthews.

"Let's come to a business understanding first. If you clear him, with all that they have on him now, it will make you as a lawyer."

"Yes; but I'm not thinking about that. He's my friend."

"Precisely—and you are willing to pay well to save a friend. What's a good, strong, convincing alibi worth?"

"No crooked work goes!"

This reply—which was not an answer—came so sharply that Jeffreys saw Matthews' devotion to his friend was not so strong as to make him forget his own interests, young as he was. "In case of a slip," thought Jeffreys, "this young fellow is going to have his own alibi—on ice. But I've got to find out about this Stuyvesant—and, besides, I need the money."

Then there came to him a three minutes' part he had once played—that of an aged and loyal servitor in a ducal family to whom the young heir was unjust. Restraining his desire to laugh, The Fixer, with the offended dignity of the loyal servant, said:

"Mr. Matthews, you sent for me. I didn't solicit this case. If you continue

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to reflect upon my integrity, I must, in self-respect—my most cherished possession—withdraw."

"I didn't mean to be offensive," replied Matthews quickly. "But we lawyers have to be very—careful in such cases."

"And so do we consulting detectives. Our honor——"

Jeffreys stopped.

"I beg your pardon," said Matthews contritely. "But did he tell you where he was on the night of the robbery?"

Jeffreys shook off his cloak of outraged dignity and asked shrewdly:

"What's a good, clean, straight alibi worth—best people—without a flaw? Five thousand?"

"If I have to pay it myself, yes."

"I'll take your word for it. Now, tell me the name of the girl he's gone on."

"Good Lord! What do you mean?"

"What's her name?"

"Laura Donald."

"I see—a mill-girl, and the hard, old, purse-proud aristocratic uncle disapproves of her."

"Heavens, man, no! She's his ward. She lives with him. He dotes on her—as much as he dotes on anybody or anything but money. You see, Bursley and Donald started the mill twenty years ago. Donald and his wife were killed in a railroad accident back in 1905, and the girl—she's twenty—will come into a big slice of the mills at twenty-one. Silas holds everything in trust till then."

"Ah, yes; and he'd just as soon keep it all in the family?"

"Exactly—but the girl likes George."

Jeffreys heard this in silence. "It's all clear," he thought. "The old fellow will have to give up the girl's share in a year, and he can't let go without taking some of it while he can. If he can get rid of George, so much the better—he sure doesn't want him as a partner. And I thought it was that poor kid! Well, on with my heavy dignity for this—lawyer cub."

"Mr. Matthews," he said aloud, gravely, "it may take me a week. Let our young friend simmer—treat him as a sick child. I'm off—to my duties."

JEFFREYS went directly to the big, ugly house of Silas Bursley upon Kensington's choicest street, where he asked for Miss Donald. It took him fifteen minutes to gain access to the house, during which time he admired the cast-iron deer upon the lawn and sent a half-dozen messages to her through the butler. Then he was shown into the library, and had to wait fifteen minutes more before Laura Donald came in with Mrs. Bursley. As always, when planning to fix things, Jeffreys dropped his eyelids; his eyes were almost closed. But he could see that, though Mrs. Bursley's brown hair was faded, her complexion was still fresh and fair, that her manner was that of one used to placating others and that she was timid and greatly distressed. He decided that she would be no obstacle to his finding out what he came to learn. He also saw the girl. Blue-eyed, abundant light-brown hair and rosy cheeks; but, with all her bloom and unsophistication, there was a latent air of forcefulness. She made Jeffreys think of the typical wilful ingénue of melodrama a generation ago. She reminded him, too, of one he had known years ago—off the stage, before he went wrong—when he was really young.

Jeffreys decided to speak to Mrs. Bursley first.

"I suppose you feel greatly distressed about the unfortunate position Mr. Bursley—Mr. George Bursley—is in."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Bursley timidly.

"He will come out all right," went on Jeffreys lightly.

"Oh, do you really think so?" cried the girl impulsively.

"Yes; I'm sure of it. We met at a boxing-bout—we're both fond of them."

"I know. You are the gentleman who got the pin I gave him—when he lost it."

"Yes; I was able to do that—and we became friends."

There was a momentary pause, and the imperturbable Fixer went on:

"How did you enjoy the entertainment—for devastated France? Was that your first experience, Miss Donald?"

Mrs. Bursley gasped, and then, half hysterically:

"Laura, Laura, I knew it must come out! You should have told at once. Now it is much worse. But George was wrong—he knows how unreasonable Mr. Bursley is at times—and he begged us not to. Laura wanted to see it. He didn't want to take her, but she insisted——"

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"There, there, Aunt Martha!" said the girl soothingly. "Never mind that now."

Mrs. Bursley began to weep softly.

"What will Mr. Bursley say? I can't endure it!"

The girl's eyes flashed. She turned to Jeffreys.

"Did George tell you? Did he send you here? And did he say it was time—to speak?"

"No; he wouldn't tell. I saw you there."

"But I wore my new harem veil."

"Yes; but I saw him, and I guessed it was you because of your apparent effort to keep concealed—and knowing how much he thought of you." The girl's face softened. "It will be best for him—as well as for you—if you will confirm a few things." The Fixer's voice had the old melodramatic thrill.

"We must tell my uncle, Mr. Silas Bursley—at once—" began the girl.

"Permit me to suggest, since I have had so much experience in such things—as a consulting detective—that you say nothing for a day or two longer. Just answer a question or two now. It will help—George—" He paused and added mentally, "And me."

"Go on; ask them," said Laura.

"What time did you get home?"

"Eleven forty-five."

"That was the time of the robbery—he couldn't have got to the mills, could he?"

"Of course not!"

"Are you sure of the time?"

"Yes; I looked at the clock when I came in."

"Just keep quiet for a day or two. Don't even let Mr. George Bursley know I have been here—or any one else. It is a real pleasure to a detective to deal with women who can keep quiet, as you two have. I'll let you know how it is all coming out—in a very short time."

JEFFREYS walked back to Matthews' office. As he passed the mills, Silas Bursley came out and was about to enter the waiting car when he caught sight of Jeffreys. Out of the corner of his half-closed eyes The Fixer saw the old man halt to look after him. Jeffreys sauntered past Matthews' office before he turned to look in his turn, and it was not until the old man drove off that he ventured to enter.

"Where's the pig-headed kid?" he asked Matthews lightly.

"I sent him to his rooms to rest up. What luck?"

"Miss Donald was with him at Madison Square Garden. They're all afraid of that old man."

Matthews jumped.

"Are you sure? Do you know what time they reached home?"

"Eleven forty-five—I've just seen the girl."

Matthews showed his surprise.

"That clears George," he said quickly.

"If you're any kind of a lawyer, it does," replied Jeffreys. "You can, at the very least, get a reasonable doubt on that. The watchman says it happened before twelve—he heard the clock strike twelve just as he came to. Even if he was out only a few minutes, George couldn't have got from the house to the mills in time without a fast car—they've got to prove a fast car," ran on Jeffreys eagerly. He was on familiar ground now—that of finding flaws in the prosecutor's case. "Next to a full alibi, a reasonable doubt is sure fire," he added.

The young lawyer frowned, and said slowly,

"It's strong so far; but what about the glove, and—worst of all—the finding of the brief-case in his bed?"

Jeffreys laughed lightly.

"I see you haven't had many criminal cases."

"No; this is my first. Indeed, to be truthful, my first real case of any kind."

"Well, I'll put you wise. The case against George was fixed—and fixed by a blunderer. It shows all the joints."

"I don't follow you?"

"No robber—unless he was crazy—would stop to take off a glove at such a time—after he had the money—and leave it there. And his own glove! That's a joke. That was placed there by some one who wanted George suspected. You can say that—can't you?—over and over again to the jury."

"But the brief-case?"

"Fixed. The kid himself had the best idea about that. He said the police put it there to make him talk—and that made him all the more stubborn. One thing is sure: you've got a reasonable doubt."

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"Yes; it's very strong. But the glove and the brief-case, taken together, would go a long way with a Jersey jury."

"Can any one hear us?" asked The Fixer, lowering his voice.

"Certainly not; but come in my consultation-room."

Jeffreys smiled and followed Matthews into the smaller room where he had talked with George. Matthews motioned him to a seat and said,

"Go ahead."

Slowly Jeffreys unfolded the story of Mr. Stuyvesant while the eyes of Matthews opened wider as his astonishment grew.

"So you think it was old Silas himself!" he exclaimed. "George said they had lost a lot of finished silk lately."

"Sure it was!" replied Jeffreys confidently. "He had the same gray beard and gray hair. The light was bad; but I wouldn't mistake the cut of that beard."

"My God!" exclaimed Matthews. "But you got a good look, in a better light, of the man who let you in?"

"Short, dark, thick-set, with a heavy brown mustache——"

"The watchman—he's a great favorite of the old man's. He's been in the mills from the start."

Jeffreys grinned.

"It all fits in. The old fellow wanted to make what he could for himself."

"But his own nephew?"

"That's simple enough. The nephew got in the way. You said the girl comes into her own in a year. Well, I wonder you didn't think of it—he's got to give an accounting then. Who knows?"

And Jeffrey's soul was filled with regret. "I wish I had been one of these respectable crooks. There's more in it," he thought.

"By the way," he said suddenly, "who all were there when the brief-case was found?"

"Only the detectives and the watchman, who was assisting them."

Jeffreys sniffed.

"It's all so stupid," he said contemptuously.

Matthews sat still in silence for a long time, and finally said in a strained voice:

"I said five thousand. If you prove your case, George and I will make it more. But what's to be done next?"

"Stall along until you hear fro n me. I'll search that loft—at the first chance. We ought to get something there that will clinch things."

IT WAS quite dark when Jeffreys stepped out of Matthews' office. The streets in Kensington's down-town district were almost deserted, but his practised ear told him some one was following him. He quickened his pace, and the steps behind him quickened. He slowed up, and the follower slowed up. He looked behind him cautiously once or twice, but couldn't make up his mind which of the half-dozen men he saw was shadowing him. He reached the railway station and boarded the train without finding out. He concluded that the police were keeping an eye on him. He was right.

The fact that he had been followed to the Kensington station prompted The Fixer to remain quietly in his Lexington Avenue rooms for two days. On the third day he hunted up the friend who had told him of Mr. Stuyvesant. At midnight, by way of the fire-escape and carrying a small black bag, the two entered the down-town loft of the Whynot Silk Company. They began to search the desk at once, and in the back of the lowermost drawer Jeffreys discovered a bundle wrapped in brown paper. He opened it naturally, and his jaw dropped in amazement. The bundle contained a short, gray, stubby beard and a gray wig—such as he had seen on Stuyvesant—and old Silas!

Jeffreys stood still, with his eyes almost closed, until his companion said sharply:

"Don't go to sleep. It's only Stuyvesant's mattress. I knew that was phony. Here—stick these in your pocket—for luck."

He handed Jeffreys a check-book and a half-dozen opened letters. Jeffreys jammed these into his pocket and put the wig and beard in the bag. For fifteen minutes longer they searched, but found nothing that interested them.

There was no time for the examination of their find, but there was plenty of time for thought on the subway ride to Harlem. Jeffreys, used to surprises, was entirely stumped by the discovery of the beard and wig.

They were a clear alibi for old Silas, more convincing, even, than George's

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"reasonable doubt." It must be the young fellow, after all.

Jeffreys was a bit peeved at himself. He had been fully deceived by the young man's look of surprise at being called "Mr. Stuyvesant." As for the young lawyer, he was slicker than he seemed. And these two kids had played him—an expert fixer. Still, the reasonable doubt—good old reasonable doubt—ought to bring in that five thousand, for the whole trick depended on it now. They couldn't—slick as they were—run out on him. He knew too much.

He tried to figure it all out and concluded that the watchman—probably the man at the loft—was in on the deal and had fixed the time of the robbery wrong. The glove was a nervous slip. The finding of the brief-case, as young George knew, was a police trick to trap him into some admission.

"They do make 'em slick in these small towns—sometimes," thought Jeffreys. "But only think of 'em taking me in! I ought to have known there was something crooked when they sent for me."

On reaching his rooms, Jeffreys took out the beard and wig and examined them carefully. They were well and expensively made. He was pleased with himself for having detected in the dim light nearly a month before that they were not real. Then he remembered the check-book and the letters, and he took them from his pocket and examined them. And then it was all clear.

IT WAS hardly more than daybreak the next morning when The Fixer called Matthews on the telephone and asked him to meet the train that arrived at Kensington at eight o'clock.

Matthews was there with his flivver. A few brief words were enough to make Matthews ask eagerly,

"What shall we do next?"

"Pick up George. Tell him nothing, or he may spoil it, and go to old Silas at once. There it will unravel itself."

A half-hour later the car stopped at the big Bursley house. Matthews jumped out, ran up the steps and entered the house alone. In ten minutes he came to the door and beckoned George and Jeffreys. The butler led the three men into the library, where sat Silas, stern and forbidding, and the two women, nervous and excited. There were no formalities or any signs of friendly recognition.

Silas motioned the three early callers to seats and said,

"I have agreed to give you fifteen minutes—longer if George will make a full confession——"

George started to interrupt. Matthews stopped him.

"You promised to keep still until I told you to tell your story."

George subsided, and Silas continued:

"I warn you, Matthews, that the first sign I see of a trick will result in my showing you—all three—my door. Proceed."

Decision, marked and aggressive, accompanied every word—entirely in keeping, Jeffreys thought, with that fighting Bursley nose.

"This gentleman will explain," said Matthews, waving his hand in the direction of The Fixer.

"And I shall reserve the right to believe as much as I think best of what—this—gentleman says." There was a touch of contempt in Silas's tone, and he added: "I have had his record looked into. It is not very savory—to say no more."

The Fixer smiled affably and began:

"I'll admit it's a queer case for me to be in, but it just happened I had to go along with it. At first, I thought George Bursley committed the robbery, because he resembled a man who called himself 'Mr. Stuyvesant'——"

"Stuyvesant again! Who is he?" cried George.

Matthews raised his hand to George.

"I was told he was a collector—of Bursley silks," replied Jeffreys quietly. "But a few minutes' talk with George convinced me that he not only was not Mr. Stuyvesant but that he didn't even know him, and that there was another reason why George wouldn't tell where he was on the night of the robbery. I learned—no matter how—that George had taken a lady with a natural and modern curiosity to see the boxing-bouts in aid of devastated France, and that the lady and George were both afraid of an inconsiderate, tyrannical elderly man."

Matthews repressed a smile; George showed his discomfiture, while Mrs. Bursley and Laura flushed crimson. Silas looked

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upon the verge of apoplexy. He glared at Jeffreys and then turned to his wife and Laura.

"Do I hear rightly? Is this true—you"—he concentrated his gaze on the girl—"went to see—a prize-fight?" he gasped.

Laura trembled, raised her head and nodded, with a trace of defiance in the motion.

"The very best people in New York were there," went on the imperturbable Jeffreys, "but, of course, the sanctimonious people who make silk——"

"I'm in no humor for such jests as yours," interrupted Silas sharply. "Proceed."

"When I found this out, I thought that you"—The Fixer looked significantly at Silas—"knew more about Mr. Stuyvesant than anybody else."

There was amazement on every face except those of Matthews and Jeffreys. Silas sprang to his feet.

"That I would rob—myself—are you crazy? It's infamous! The very thought is insulting."

"It has been done—for burglary insurance. But calm yourself. I can prove you're innocent."

The old man glared for a full minute. Then he sat down.

"Finish this remarkable story. I'll hear it out," he said, grimly.

"I knew, no matter how—we consulting detectives never tell all we know; only so much as adds to our reputation for phenomenal acumen—a man with a short gray beard and gray hair, calling himself 'Mr. Stuyvesant,' was trying to divert a wagon-load of Bursley silk on its way to New York——"

"And you dared to suspect that I—" Silas choked with indignation.

The Fixer opened his bag and placed the beard and wig on the library table. They were so like his own that Silas gasped again. He went over, picked the things up and examined them. The Fixer went on,

"I couldn't understand it at all until I examined these, which were found at the same time." Here Jeffreys handed the check-book and the papers to Silas. He glanced at them hurriedly.

"Lemuel—dabbling in a bucket-shop—and planning to rob—me!" he said in a low, strained voice.

Mrs. Bursley and Laura rose to their feet, Mrs. Bursley barely suppressing a shriek. Laura put her arms round her and led her out.

"Yes, it's a bucket-shop," continued Jeffreys quietly. "It failed yesterday. I'm sorry—but I must go on. Mr. Matthews tells me this morning that Lemuel was moved to tears when he found the glove. It may interest you to know that his companion at the New York loft—where I think you will find most of your stolen silk—was a short, thick-set man, of the same type as the watchman who was slightly assaulted, bound and gagged—the same man who accompanied the detectives when they discovered the brief-case in George's bed. He's clever—he got away with that while the police were examining the ceiling, the walls and other impossible places."

Silas hardly heard all this. He was panting and trying to catch his breath. Suddenly, in a broken voice, he asked,

"Does Lemuel know—of these things?"

"Not yet," replied Matthews. "I suggest—in the interest of justice—of George—you send for him."

Silas did not reply. He reached for the telephone and got Lemuel at once. For twenty minutes the group sat in silence—the heavy silence that is so noticeable at funerals. Then Lemuel came in quickly. In one swift glance he saw the wig, the beard and the telltale slips on the table. Then he turned and saw The Fixer.

"Good-morning, Mr. Stuyvesant," began Jeffreys.

Lemuel swayed and fell to the floor.

"I told you we brought a confession. There it is!" said Matthews, pointing to Lemuel Bursley on the floor.

"Lift him to the couch—and leave us, Matthews," said Silas hoarsely.

THE three callers, having put the unconscious Lemuel where he was safe for the present, turned to go. Silas put his hand on George's shoulder.

"You stay, George. I've done you more ill than I can ever repair."

When Matthews and Jeffreys reached the sidewalk, The Fixer said:

"The real danger in fixing is overfixing. Is my check on ice—ready to serve?"

"It is," replied Matthews, grinning. "Come to the office and get it."

They entered the flivver and drove off.

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"Maw—mother!" She had crumpled to her knees on the floor. "I ain't been a good daughter to you, mother, but I will be from now on."

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A Novelette

Fulfilment

She Was an Illiterate Mountain Woman with Few Opportunities, but Life Gave Her Something. "There Ain't Nothin' to Cry Over," She Said to Her Man from Her Death-Bed. "Life's Give Me All It Could—It's Give Me You"

By Stanley Olmsted

Author of "Mountain Farmers," "Transition," etc.

Illustrations by Gerald Leake

AFTER the children had been given pails of corn pone and sorghum and sent on their way to school, Georgia Sneed stepped out on the porch of the new Sneed dwelling, which stood a few yards from the site of the old one.

Across the road from the house a wooded hill humped itself like the conical pile of a fallen wall. Snow fell with a fluttering that often seemed upward rather than downward. The hill was etched all over in black lines of boughs, vaguely organic groups radiating in feather-pattern, each group from a central stem. Never had Georgia felt this barrier intruding at the very threshold of the Sneeds as she felt it now.

The hill was different in the summer-time. It was equally close—so close that the rhododendron blooms smote the eye with waxen translucence whenever you emerged from inside the windowless house. But at such times the swimming peak of Atoah carried you beyond whatever was near. There was no Atoah Top when snow fell like this.

Though the Sneed farm lay at the top of the knob which bore the family name, the dwelling was sheltered in the abrupt dip of a hollow. Georgia could not help picturing this morning a relentless accumulation of flakes piling until the hollow should be full of dead-white silence.

Even her arms, which longed to beat against the hill, were not free. A tightly wound shawl bound them, and clasped under the shawl was the sixteen-months-old baby brother, now no longer the youngest Sneed. He kept very still, peering out with round eyes and head snuggled, half frightened, to her breast. From beneath a flapping rent of the shawl he was taking cognizance of a new world filled with dazzling quivers that both menaced and allured.

Georgia had stilled his wailings for his mother by bringing him out and showing him this white whirl. In the dusk-filled room behind them, now overheated by a new stove, Mrs. Sneed lay abed with a younger baby brother, not yet five days old.

"Georgie!" The weakened voice was calling them back.

"Yes, maw; I'm a-comin'."

But she lingered a moment. Some one on horseback was passing along the road. Through the falling snow the figure was indistinct. It was shrouded in a slate-colored slicker which melted into the leafless hillside. The very sound of the hoofs was inaudible. Visually, the figure was but a wraith. To Georgia, however, it was as vivid as if it radiated color and identity. She had recognized the rider at the first waver of deeper grayness when his horse moved from behind the slanting edge of naked trees.

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He was abreast of the house now. And now, carried by hoofs that seemed shod with heavy felt, he was beyond it. Would he turn into the garden beyond? She waited until he passed the ramshackle gate. This gate was on the rise of Sneed's Knob, above the point where the hollow dipped deepest.

He did not turn in. He rode straight on and vanished under the hemlocks. She told herself that he could not have seen her. The heaviness on her spirits redoubled.

"Georgie!" A querulous plaint was in her mother's voice. The girl was accustomed to it.

"I'm a-comin' maw—d'rectly."

Her eyes were fixed on the hemlocks where he had vanished. She turned slowly and moved inside to the bedside of Mrs. Sneed. Instantly little Tom's head bobbed from under her shawl. His arms went out and he pulled away so lustily, trying to get to his mother, that Georgia's slim frame was wrenched in holding him.

"Give him to me, Georgie," said Mrs. Sneed in a tone that matched the child's own whining. "I can take him now. Little Lee's suckled hisself asleep."

The girl surrendered the child and poked at the fire in the stove.

"Move a chair up close to me," said Mrs. Sneed. "I want to talk to ye—about a lot o' things."

She cuddled her two youngest offspring on either side her with the apathy of habit. The effort of the slight raising of her voice had tired her. No further words were exchanged between mother and daughter until little Tom, now entirely contented, dozed away into slumber.

"Seems like this is the first mornin' since little Lee was borned that ever'thin' 's still enough for me to talk."

The mountain-woman's words were so nearly voiceless that Georgia had to lean forward to catch them after moving the split-bottom chair yet closer. Her face was a mask touched with sullenness.

"I ain't never said nothin' all these months," Mrs. Sneed went on, "but it's never onct left my mind—it's just like a knife in my heart—your sister Viney, way off in Seattle—half-way round the world—disgraced—married to a half-breed and a bastard——"

The girl's frame stiffened. Words of defense rose to her lips, but she restrained them. She remained silent.

"But it ain't agin her that I feel hard. She's my own flesh and blood—borned out of my body. And it ain't agin the Indian she married, neither. Savages don't know right from wrong. It's agin Boleman Mayfield that my mind's so bitter I can taste it in my mouth—so bitter it's a-killin' me. I'll never raise this last 'un, Georgie. You and Viney's the only two of my children I'll ever see growed up——"

THE daughter's self-control gave way. She interrupted with fierce intensity.

"You ain't got no right to be so set against Boleman Mayfield—and him livin' right on here without a stain on his name! You ain't got no right to keep on feelin' he helped Viney disgrace us—or that what she done was disgraceful! Viney had a right to her happiness—even if it did mean marryin' Scawl Tallotuskee. When two people love—they jist love. How can you help knowin' that, even if you ain't had much experience—married to paw when you was fifteen and four or five children already before you was twenty-five? Viney had told me things—I knowed she loved Scawl before Bole— If anybody's to blame it's me, not Bole. He stood by her when she went to Scawl because there wasn't nobody else with the courage—not even me!"

"I blame him for it all," condemned the mother. "He influenced her to go. He defied yo' paw at the muzzle of a gun——"

"He had to, maw—or be shot dead."

"At the muzzle of a gun," persisted the sick woman, "when him and Viney nussed Scawl together, after that Indian squaw shot the feller. God's shorely agin the Sneeds or he'd 'a' let that bad-born half-breed die!"

Georgia thought, "How can a woman bear ten children, nine still living, and keep so narrow and hard!"

But she said nothing. Before that marriage, while Scawl lay between life and death and Viney had watched at his bedside, this arraignment had gone on interminably. Georgia had defended to the point of exhaustion. She had resolved never again to reply to it.

"And now," resumed her mother, "the very land we live on will be tuk from us if

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Boleman Mayfield says the word in the court-house at Stoversville—and he knows how we hate him!"

"Yes," murmured Georgia; "he knows how we hate him—he won't even turn his face this way when he rides past our house."

"Ain't I a-tellin' ye? It's his bad conscience!" The sick woman's voice leaped to eagerness, because her daughter seemed to side with her. "And mark my words—he'll do what he can to help make yo' paw lose that suit with the Johnstone Lumber Company. Mark my words—he's agin us worse than we're agin him! He'll ruin us! He'll testify agin yo' paw's boundary claim!"

Georgia wondered. Would Boleman do that? Her father had insulted him, had threatened to shoot him for guarding Viney when she saved the life of the man she loved. And her father *had* done a high-handed thing in taking off the timber from a piece of land he might not be able to prove he owned. Mayfield was in a position to know just how high-handed—or how much justified by counter-claims and traditions. He was state surveyor for the White Wing section, in which he was born. His testimony in court would go farther than that of any dozen other men. Would he be against them? Or would he be for them—for Viney's sake—for Viney married to a Cherokee who was Boleman's own half-brother—as everybody knew by now?

Then all at once her misgivings about Boleman became clear as crystal, like the man's character—as she interpreted it.

"No, maw," she said. She spoke gently now, for she began to feel sorry for her mother, sorry for herself, sorry for them all. "No, maw; you can't count on any of that—not if it's wrong. You can jist count on one thing: Boleman Mayfield won't swear to nothin' but what he believes is the truth—and nobody knows the truth about our White Wing farms and timber-land better than him. If the truth is for us, he'll be for us. If it's agin us, he'll tell it as he sees it, and he'd do that anyhow, even if paw had treated him right instead of insultin' him and threatenin' to kill him. That's all you can count on. Resentment ain't goin' to influence anything Boleman Mayfield swears to."

In her earnestness her voice rose clear and distinct. Little Tom stirred suddenly, wide-awake from his brief nap. He lifted his small head and held out his arms to his sister.

"Bless his heart—he wants to see the snow again!" cried Georgia. "I'll wrap him up good and take him all round the hill."

It was an excuse for escaping; Tom's outstretched baby arms were a passport of a relief so poignant it strained her.

"Sis'll show him the snow, honey," she said, lifting the child.

"He's gettin' weaned away from me already," complained the mother. "That's the way they all are—before they can talk or walk they begin——"

"I'll not take him far from home, maw. You're all comf'table, ain't you? Here—I'll set this cow-bell on the chair right where you can tap it the minute you need me for anything."

"All like that," repeated Mrs. Sneed weakly, "before they can talk or walk! I ain't said half of all that's on my mind."

"Tap the cow-bell the minute you need me," admonished Georgia soothingly. "I'll hear you and hurry right back."

THERE were tracks in the snow by the porch—sole-marks of calked boots. Georgia did not see them. She descended the precarious steps at the farther end eagerly, and fairly ran toward a group of sheds on the rising ground a hundred yards back.

"Sister show little Tom moo-calf," she crooned, breathless, as she ran. "Poor little moo-calf—ain't got any mother——"

She stopped suddenly. The child had ducked his head close to her neck under the shawl. She slowed down her steps and blushed a deep crimson. The baby's eyes had been quicker than her own.

Boleman Mayfield was untethering his horse, which seemed to have been tied to a post of one of the sheds. It must look exactly to him as if she were running out to catch him before he got away. She was overwhelmed with shame and confusion.

He doffed his felt hat courteously and stepped toward her, leading his gray mare.

"You—Bole!" she flustered. "I saw you ride past a little while ago—but I never dreamed you was anywhere nigh. I thought you'd be two or three miles closer to Stoversville by now."

"I went on and met the mail down by the

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ford," he explained, "and decided to turn back. Sam Smathers brought a letter for Clara Donbrook from Viney. I knew you'd want to know about it—there's always a letter for you inside those she sends to Clara. Then, too, I thought I'd just see if there wasn't somethin' I could get or do for your mother in Stoversville. I decided to brazen matters out at last and come in to see you-all and try to act as if I believed I'd be welcome——"

"But you changed your mind——"

"I lost my nerve," he admitted, smiling, with wistfulness in his candid eyes. "Somebody with a voice mighty like yours was defending me so warmly that I—I couldn't see any use in makin' it harder for her—I just sneaked back to my horse."

"And I reckon you think I ran out to get you to stay."

"If I thought that, Georgie—I'd—I'd—well, I believe I might get my nerve back."

She went red again and hurried to change the subject.

"Maw's mighty low-spirited since little Lee was borned. I never knowed it to go so hard with her before. It's mighty kind of you to be willin' to be neighborly-like."

"If you-all could only forgive me—about Viney—" he began and halted. He had meant to say, "There's no end to the neighborly things I'd love to do," but the sentence would not get itself spoken. It might sound like self-praise. His flush of awkwardness matched her own.

YET it was an open admission, and the girl understood. So he did long for forgiveness—for the reestablishment of a friendly footing with her people! The thing he left unsaid was like a firebrand igniting the train of her longings. She fought against the collapse of a sense of honor matching his own, and of a pride which went beyond his own. She had never doubted he was her friend; and now he made it plain that he was something more than that. She had caught him at the crux of weakness, where she might tempt him.

"When does Stoversville court meet next," she asked him, trembling. She was trying to steer away from the subject that filled her thoughts; and no sooner had she spoken than she realized how she pitched toward it headlong.

Instantly, too, she saw how great had been the mistake. A quietude fell upon him. She longed to drop her gaze to the ground. Yet her eyes were fixed upon him staringly—unable to blink in the paralysis of her anxiety and her yearning.

"It meets week after next," he answered. "Well, I reckon I'd better be movin' on. I'll take Viney's letter to Clara Donbrook, and she'll let you know all that's in it and give you whatever's in it for you. I'll be ridin' back this way and on to Stoversville by night, I reckon. You're sure there's nothin' I can find that'll make yo' maw more comf'table? She needn't know I get it. Clara can bring it over."

He turned to spring on his horse. Georgia thought she could detect the lurk of pain in his eyes. She caught at his elbow, retaining him. The last rampart of her pride and of her principle had given way. Anything was better than this. Such a parting! An opportunity that never might come again so wasted!

"Oh, Bole," she pleaded, "there's a way to make maw and paw and everybody that thinks you done wrong forgive you about Viney—yes, and forgive Viney, too—and forgive even Scawl that you helped her to marry. If you save paw in that lawsuit, all old grudges 'll be forgot—I know my own folks—I know their nature— Oh, Bole, do promise me—promise me you'll testify for paw, whether he was right or wrong when he took that timber! Part of it went to buildin' our new house—me and Viney put up most of it with our own hands while paw had to be away earnin' wages to buy us clothes with—our new house which keeps us from freezin' like we used to in the old leaky cabin."

He sprang into the saddle.

"Less'n a half-hour ago," he said, "when I heard you tell yo' maw you knew I'd only do whatever was right, you made me the proudest man alive. But now I'm not proud any more. You didn't mean it. You were just sayin' it to keep her quieted."

"No, Bole; no! Please, please don't think that a-way! Can't you understand? Two or three thousand dollars' worth o' timber ain't nothin' to the Johnstone Company. They're just a crew of rich men. But it's ruin for paw if he loses this suit. Maw kept warnin' him he was takin' too much for granted about his boundaries. After their worry about Viney it'll break

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the spirits of both of 'em—it may kill maw—she's got the notion already she's goin' to die——"

He reached down for her hands. They were, however, clutching little Tom, as if holding him to her against all depredation. But the child's shyness had worn off, and it was little Tom's wrists that he caught in a single, gentle grip of one strong palm.

"Moo-moo-moo—" went the child, showing off his newest accomplishment.

"See!" she cried. "He likes you—and he hardly ever likes any strange person. He trusts you!"

"If only you could, too, Georgie!" He clucked, starting his horse.

She felt as if her heart must surely break as his gray slicker and gray mare gradually were veiled away by thickening gauzes of falling snow.

THE flakes lost their note of caress as Mayfield ascended far up where the old logging-road was a mere niche in the bluff-like drop of Cowslide. Far below him, Little White Wing Creek, plowing in roaring foam through the gorge, seemed a sort of maddened drift, as if the storm had rallied here and gone angry.

He was on his way back to the McKenna farm to deliver Viney's letter to Clara. It was natural that Clara should be the one friend to whom Viney made bold to write, enclosing little missives for her sister. The breath of scandal is a bond.

In both instances—Viney's and Clara's—it was a false breath, as every one knew by now. But tale-mongering passes like a blight, to be softened only by aftermaths of time. Clara McKenna had married a divorced man, named Donbrook, with a little son. The affair had brought on the accidental shooting of the sister, who had always mothered her—poor Lissie McKenna, struck by a bullet from one of Clara's rejected suitors.

And so Clara's name had had to be dragged through the Stoversville court—and the narrower element in the community deemed that in itself a smirch. Bash Miggons had been the rejected suitor—a stepson of Mrs. Miggons. He and his brothers and others of their gang had been tried for Lissie's murder. Their defense had been that they went to the McKenna farm, back of Atoah and Cowslide, to drive out a stranger who concealed his past—who was attempting the seduction of a respected mountain girl. It was a defense that proved utterly worthless. Bash Miggons had received the severest sentence of all—fifteen years at hard labor. His stepmother would never forget that culmination. It did not make matters any better that she herself was inured to scandal. She snapped her fingers when people whispered that she had liked this stepson better than his father—that she had taken the old man because she could not capture the young one.

Viney's name had escaped the courts. The squaw who had shot young Scawl Tallotuskee was dead within the hour of her deed. But the tale of how Viney had nursed the half-breed out of the Valley of the Shadow had raced like a mill-current, beyond White Wing, into adjoining counties. Boleman pondered upon it as he rode—the two girls, each of them married, under a cloud to the man she loved.

Where the road swung sharply downward toward Little White Wing Valley at the pine turn, he met Chester Donbrook, the man Clara McKenna had married. He was carrying his little boy gleefully on his shoulder. They were exulting together at the snow. They were out for a lark in it, and had come two miles, up-hill all the way.

"Heigho!" hailed Donbrook. "What's this, friend Bole? We thought you'd be safe by the sitting-room fire in the old Miggons House in Stoversville by this time."

"I turned back," said Mayfield. "Sam Smathers brought a letter for your wife—and I happened to recall two or three other little things I might as well attend to first. It's goin' to slacken up soon. I'll ride over this evenin'. Here—let *me* take the kid!"

The youngster lost no time scrambling to the pommel of the saddle in front of "Uncle Bole."

Donbrook walked beside them as the mare ambled downward. The snowfall was thinning.

"You folks with farms in Little White Wing Valley are lucky," said Mayfield. "Half the time you're just beyond the worst of most of the storms. They seem to lash themselves on poor old Sneed's Knob and Bald Stone, and wear themselves out along on Cowslide before they get over the mountain and down to you."

Donbrook laughed contentedly.

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"In other words, we're tucked so far away and out of sight the very clouds hesitate. It's funny, Mayfield, that you're willing to stay here weeks at a time, boarding with Clara and brother Wade and me, when you might be in the wide-awake winter resort of Asheville—a college grad like you!"

"You're a great one to be wonderin' at that," returned the other. "I'm a native born and bred, who'll speak the dialect and be a hill-bill till he dies. And you—an author, a Newspaper Row Manhattanite—tell me its funny!"

"Oh, authors don't count on any rule of logic." Donbrook smiled back. "If I hadn't found some such cranny as this to hide away in—with the right girl waiting just as if she been conserved for me in a great green jar full of attar-of-laurel blossoms, I'd have lost my soul. I reckon we're one of a piece, Bole."

"Reckon! You'll be talkin' the same language as the rest of us, Donbrook, before this kid's ready for your Harvard."

"No Harvard for him!" replied the father. "His *alma mater's* going to be yours, Bole—old Chapel Hill—your state university. As for that 'dialect' to which you're so loyal and of which you're so self-conscious, he talks it already—better'n you do."

"He'll drop it, though. It ain't in his blood—like it is in mine."

"I wish to God it were!"

And seeing how gravely Donbrook spoke, and feeling he had been thoughtless and clumsy because the child's own mother was said to be an actress, Boleman hastened to rectify himself.

"Lord! How earnest folks get whenever this blood-talk springs up. As if human nature wasn't the same everywhere! As if we was all anything but brothers in orneryness and pestiferousness! Look, son; look!" he cried gaily to the boy on his saddle-pommel. "Look at that ground-hog crossin' the road ahead of us, leavin' his mark on every inch of his way. Now, ain't he a fool, son, to give hisself away like that?"

"Le's climb down and foller him and pull him out," proposed Chester, junior excitedly. He jumped nearly upright, and craned with such suddenness that only Boleman's strong grip kept him from pitching headlong over the horse's head.

"None of that, Chester!" reproved the father. "Sit quiet or you'll get yourself and Uncle Bole into trouble. Uncle Bole's mare's got more mettle when she's annoyed than she seems to have when folks behave."

He regretted the allusion the instant he made it. The mare had once belonged to the Sneeds. Clara, his wife, had told him how Viney had been on its back when it became frightened at a rattlesnake on the dangerous Cowslide cut, how Scawl Tallotuskee had saved her life, how it had been the dawn of Viney's realization that she loved the lad—loved a Cherokee half-breed.

And this half-breed was Boleman's older half-brother—though the fact had been a secret until his marriage. There had been some boyhood union of Boleman's father with an Indian girl—some hidden banns of Cherokee ritualism never recognized by law. As the story went, the Indian girl herself had repudiated it and married one of her race and died. The boy had been brought up as a Cherokee. Boleman never spoke of the relationship.

"This mornin'," piped little Chester, "I saw *free rabbits!* Mamma Clara wouldn't let me shoot 'em. This mornin' I found two lines of tracks where a polecat had trailed a chickadee bird out from our sprin'-house. Mamma Clara wouldn't lemme foller the tracks only a little piece."

"Mamma Clara has a tough time of it keeping him out of trouble," commented Donbrook, and his ringing laugh was echoed back from the steeps across the gap.

The snow had ceased falling for the time being. The air was saturated with its smell, permeated by a tang of mountain-birch, to be tasted on the tongue and sniffed in the nostrils. So they rode and walked, Donbrook taking a turn on the saddle, and came duly into the valley.

THE timber property which Jiles Sneed had assumed to be his own was claimed by the Johnstone Lumber Company as part of the land purchased from Scawl. They had bought out all the Tallotuskee inheritance when the young heir had left the home of his fathers and gone with his bride across the continent—his bride who was Jiles Sneed's oldest child. Never had the details of his boundaries had any significance for him. Anybody could hunt upon them or range cattle upon them at will. There

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were game-laws and county laws that purported to regulate these things. But local custom gave every man the freedom of every mountain forest, save in the matter of cutting the timber. And Boleman Mayfiled, surveyor and boundary-expert, had assured the Johnstone Company that Scawl's titles were flawless and his boundaries clean.

It was said this great organization, that clutched at mountain after mountain like an octopus, would establish a great group of mills along the creek.

When it came to paying Scawl, the Johnstone attorneys had suddenly requested a discount of several thousand on their lump assessment-price of sixty dollars the acre, whether cleared or wooded. They had discovered certain "doubts," they said. They would assume them with the purchase and settle them in the courts if necessary, without troubling him. And Scawl had assented without query or suspicion. Always he would be the dreamer to whom all strife, struggle or dispute were repugnant, always the mystic, always the inherent poet with but a single talisman in his lifelong love for the fair-haired girl who had come to him unwooed. A few thousands less money mattered nothing. He scorned the eagerness with which these millionaires sought to save such paltriness for themselves. Even so, he was receiving enough from them to secure a life of simple independence for himself and the unwooed wife in a country of strangers thousands of miles away—a country of strangers among whom they could rebuild their lives and their friendships to a mold of dignity unhampered by prejudice. That was the only thing which counted with either of them.

THE Johnstone Company was now claiming that Jiles Sneed had cut trees owned by themselves through their purchase of the Tallotuskee titles. Long before the sale he had cut enough to build his new house. After it—after Viney and Scawl were gone—he had feverishly removed the rest of the worth-while trees from some ten-odd acres of mountainside dropping from Sneed's Knob to the Tallotuskee fields.

"Possession's nine points of the law," he said, with set jaw, when his frightened wife warned him of the consequence that might ensue. "That ten acres is mine—and what's mine I help myself to—in the face of a thousand courts and lawyers."

With the aid of loyal neighbors the timber had been cut and sold before the too complacent Johnstone Company had wakened to the fact of its "depredation." Jiles had been promptly sued for damages in an amount that would eat up his farm and the small money he had received for the timber if the Johnstones won—and if they won there seemed little doubt that they might follow up their victory with a criminal prosecution.

The raided mountainside was not merely a link between Tallotuskee and Sneed properties. It linked also with a tract of government reservation at the hooklike bend of the creek. Mayfield and his government surveyors had been compelled to study every inch of it two years before. They had been compelled to restrain Jiles' guesswork cutting on the very edge of the government property. That item alone would sound very damning to Jiles—if recited from the witness-chair. Mayfield knew that it was another stick of fuel in the flame of the Sneed family hatred.

Yet he longed to save Jiles—not alone because love had dawned and deepened between himself and Georgia when they two in all the world stood by Viney and Scawl. There was something in the fiber of Jiles himself that ever had evoked his admiration and his respect. Jiles' grim, unrelenting enmity mattered nothing.

It looked like an open-and-shut case against this wizened, toiling father of many children. Yet Mayfield still hoped against hope. There was still a fortnight left before the case would be tried. Surely there must be some loophole, some long-forgotten transaction that would bring the Johnstone Company at least to a compromise. Some vague memory seemed to elude him—something once said by his father who had been Jiles' neighbor and friend—his father who could neither read nor write, who had died when Boleman was twelve.

If only Jiles would soften enough to help prompt his recollection! Twice since fodder-pulling time he had tried to draw near the old man. Both times he had been repulsed without quarter.

"That 'ere land's mine!" Jiles would snarl, turning away. "I ain't a-tellin' sech folks as you how or why it's mine. Lawyer

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Lovingood will tell that to the jury in Stoversville when the fight comes off."

At the thought of Lovingood, Boleman's heart sank yet more. He knew the man. He was a brother of Mrs. Miggons—a step-uncle of Bash Miggons, now in the penitentiary. He was one of the "whisky-makin' Lovingoods" from over in Cheoah. If the Johnstone Company failed by any miracle to bring Jiles and his family to beggary, Lawyer Lovingood could be relied upon to finish what they left undone. Known to be untrustworthy, he was growing rich on the reputation he had formed for astuteness. Strong as a superstitition among the farmers was a faith in the wizardry of his skill. There was, as Mayfield knew better than any one else, a fighting stubbornness in the typical older mountaineer that made him prefer winning a lawsuit to holding his possessions. Lovingood had had diabolical luck in proving his clients in the right before county juries. He had been luckier yet in extracting from them more than the benefits they derived, practically without protest. He won their fights for them, and they gave him their all, unmurmuring.

THAT was why Boleman had elected to ride back before going on to Stoversville that day. He knew that Jiles was away on one of his wage-earning "jobs." It was a favoring circumstance. He would make one last effort through Mrs. Sneed, still abed with her last baby. He would reason with her, plead with her, beg her to be his advocate with her husband. She was a woman and a mother—surely he could convince her of the honesty of his desire to help.

Then, in much the manner confessed to Georgia, he had reconsidered. Standing below the porch, an involuntary eavesdropper on the girl's defense of himself and the low whine of her mother's bitterness, it came over him that he could no more move the woman than he had moved her husband. Their mental processes were one. They shared the mulish immobility of their passing generation—clinging tentacles of feeling, groping and closing on their little categories of enmity or loyalty or pride or gain or loss. He must find some way to save them. He must do that! But it would have to be without their help.

It buzzed and droned, this problem, in the background of his mind as they reached the McKenna farm.

He had rented the use of the cabin facing the cleared uplands back of the larger log house. With his own hands he had reshingled it and made it moss-tight against the cold. It was his winter home when his surveying work did not require his official presence at headquarters in Asheville. He took his meals with the family in the other house, as Donbrook had done when he had lived here two years ago—before blood had been spilled across these twin thresholds.

Donbrook was the real head of the family now. Wade McKenna, the brother, was unmarried and likely never to marry. Since Lissie's death his ruggedness had passed from him. He showed furtive touches of feebleness. Some day, no doubt, the farm would be renamed after the man who had come to it a stranger, writing his stories and poems. Newer generations would identify it with his work. The vanished clan of stalwart McKennas who had pioneered upon it would be forgotten.

Mayfield sighed. Only poor old Wade left among them all—now that Clara had become a Donbrook. And a few miles away the Johnstones would set up great lumber-mills that would represent the last word in science and efficiency. Money would be far more plentiful; the material demands of the dwellers on White Wing would increase. Mayfield sighed again. It was all progress—all as it should be. But the old life, with its magnificent isolation, was passing. The minions of Pan were dying, day by day, on the mountainsides.

Stored in the lean-to of his cabin was a small oaken barrel packed with photographs, letters, extinct legal documents, dating, most of them, from a time preceding his father's second, and legal, marriage and his own birth. Mayfield had looked through them, as a boy of seventeen, on the eve of his departure for Chapel Hill. They had seemed but of sentimental importance then. How he felt himself a man, putting such things behind him, as he gave them cursory inspection! How he had dreamed in those days of record-breaking deeds for his Old North State—the luring of capital, the conjuring of chains of factories, the

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building of highways smooth as streets!

And now—merely the sense of futility. Only the inborn love of the mountains as he had always known them, as he would wish to preserve them—alive in his soul—alive and deathless. Only such faith as came from the wish to live rightly and love selflessly, and die and make way as was meet and proper unto nature. Progress? It had worn threadbare on his enthusiasm ere the rumble of its van had grown audible out of Nantahala Valley, across the Snowbird ranges.

He had packed the valueless souvenirs in the oaken barrel and sealed the barrel with a network of stout black-hickory withes. When he had gone to France as a lieutenant he had left it in the keeping of the three McKennas, then living on the old place, and in the intervening years it had gathered dust where it now stood.

AFTER Clara had served dinner he gave her the letter from Viney.

"Come and tell me all about it when you've had time to memorize it," he told her, whimsically smiling, plainly absent-minded. "I expect to be pretty busy for two or three hours—pretty busy—blowin' away dust from the long ago."

He found his hearth still faintly glowing. He blew the coals to life and piled a roaring fire. Then he brought out the barrel from its dark corner in the lean-to. Neatly and methodically he cut the withes with his jack-knife.

There were scores of loosely scrawled letters, most of them in hazardous spelling, without capitals or punctuation. Letters of whatsoever description had been treasured by his father. They must be read aloud to him by another. They were sacred things. Here was probably assembled every message set down on paper and sent to him in the whole course of his life. There were also many tintypes, made thirty years ago in Stoversville by a local character long dead. Group-pictures. Four young men in slouch-hats and with expressions of sheepish bravado, two sitting and two standing. Callow, wistful boys, stiffly conscious, often without collars, but always with gold collar-buttons touched in. Or, sometimes, two young men sitting, with two young women standing behind them. Or, now and then, one lone young man with his bride or sweetheart agonizingly upright, her hand heavily on his shoulder, her shy eyes dilated and staring. In many of the groups his father was recognizable, sometimes clean-shaven, sometimes with a scraggly incipient beard, sometimes with a curling mustache—always wearing the slouch-hat or holding it in his hands.

There was one ambitious portrait, framed in moth-eaten plush and larger than cabinet size. It showed the head and shoulders of a girl in a tight-fitting bodice cut out square at the neck. It was the one and only keepsake ever sent back by Boleman's mother to the husband and baby she had deserted for the gay city of Atlanta. He paled slightly as he studied the set smirk straining the confused, pretty, unfinished features of a transplanted mountain beauty. His mother! And she, too, was but a wraith from a past that seemed never to have touched his being.

He slipped this raw, set-smiling young face framed in the red plush out of sight underneath all the others.

Ghosts from a long ago that had not been his own! Such among these as were not dead, like her, were bent and knotted and gray with the toil to which they were still lashed by the sun which roused them each daybreak to serve his mistress and paramour, the soil, on whose body they had been begotten. The soil—their tyrant mother!

There were crude documents, too, supplementing the pictures—written out in the sprawling hand of Stoversville's legal culture—some of them bearing the only signature possible to the father for whom he had been named:

his mark
BOLEMAN CLAY X MAYFIELD
his mark

Mayfield piled the little rusting pictures together and sorted out the letters and separated the documents before beginning a systematic study of each.

Not one relic was of less importance for his purpose than the others. The elusive glimmer he sought to trail might look out from the blur of a tintype. It might peep from the labored flourishing of a name in pencil or flash from the ungainly set of homespun trousers above hulking feet, planted about the befrayed, betasseled

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chair that figured in so many of these plaintive, blistered shadows. Anywhere, in letter, picture or document, might be the tiny key that would turn a trickle of light through some choked pinhole of childhood memory.

More than that he could not hope for. For these were no more than mute dimnesses from things long wiped away in the ceaseless effacements of time.

GEORGIA came back to the house after Bole had gone. She stirred and replenished the fire in the new stove, rearranged her mother's pillows and the coverlets, fed her from a bowl of warm broth a spoonful at a time. Before long mother and child were asleep.

Then, knowing no harm could befall them, Georgia escaped again and wandered down the road toward the post-boxes with little Tom. The slackening storm lured her with cool breath. The child's groping hands were warm on her cheek. The hemlocks hoarded the snow like white treasure beneath where the boughs spread apart. Where they thickened there were vacant spots of frozen roadway, lightly powdered.

"Neigh-hoss!" gurgled little Tom, clapping his clenched fists together.

Again he had been quicker than the musing girl who bore him uplifted on her shoulder. The "neigh-horse" he had sensed was mounting toward them. Georgia saw the head of the woman who rode it before the beast had ambled up to her line of vision. She recognized her by the headgear before the features were distinguishable. Mrs. Miggons still affected the overseas cap she had worn since her ill-fated stepson had returned from the war.

Georgia did not like the woman. She was namelessly afraid of her. She believed that, but for the influence of a stepmother like this, even such hard and reckless young men as Bash would not be in the penitentiary to-day. Yet it was necessary to be civil to her. Mrs. Miggons had of late done several kind things for Mrs. Sneed. She seemed anxious to stand in with the family—especially since Viney had made the forbidden marriage.

So the girl answered Mrs. Miggons, animated signal. When horse and rider came abreast she suffered the exaggeratedly vigorous hand-clasp bestowed upon her. Mrs. Miggons was the type of woman who prides herself on shaking hands like a man. Georgia winced under the grip, no less from repulsion than from pain.

"And if here ain't little Tom, too!" gushed the wife of the old former postmaster and Stoversville hotel-keeper. She was thirty-five or over, and wore spots of rouge on her hard, not unintelligent face.

"I never 'lowed to meet anybody so far from home on such a day," Georgia managed to murmur.

"Oh, I'm a reg'lar man, ye know. I've rode out to call on yo' maw. I've brought her a saddle of mutton"—the woman touched a bulging gunny-sacking tied to her saddle—"to make broth with—and more'n a sack full o' news!"

She laughed in her strident, jovial way, and Georgia did her best to smile responsively. It *was* kind of her to bring the mutton.

"How pretty ye're a-gettin', Georgia—a heap prettier than yer sister Viney that all our boys was so crazy about. She was a bit too plump and yaller-headed for my taste. I always did prefer brunettes, anyhow. Some slimness and pep to your style!"

Mrs. Miggons prided herself on the up-to-dateness of her speech. She had lived a while in Atlanta, prior to her marriage with Bash's father.

"I ought to be mighty grateful to you for bein' so kind to maw," said the girl.

"Give me that baby—the cunnin' sing! Always did love babies—even if I never had any except the growed-up kind."

But when she reached to appropriate Tom, the child pushed away from her and screamed frantically.

"Tum to Mis' Miggons—tum to Aunty Kate," coaxed the woman, persistently clutching for him. "Aunty Kate go gallopy-gallopy wiz 'ittle Tom! Aunty Kate gallop way off wiz 'ittle Tom!"

The child's screams became hysterical. Georgia quieted him somewhat, cuddling him close under her shawl. But he sobbed on and trembled violently against her breast.

"He's terrible shy," she apologized, deeply embarrassed. "He hardly ever sees anybody except us, you know."

"Sure! What d'ye expect? These pore little back-hill kids! Well, bein's it's me

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he's so scared of, I'll ride on ahead to yo' maw. I see ye're out takin' a walk—maybe to get the mail. Don't let me stop ye."

"I'll be up home d'rectly, Mrs. Miggons," said Georgia. "I have to stay in the house so much since maw was tuk, it's a godsend to get out once in a while. Tom and me's both crazy about the snow."

"Crazy about the snow—good Lord!" Mrs. Miggons pulled her berouged face into lines of repugnance. "Ye can just bet there was things I wanted to tell to yo' maw mighty bad or I wouldn't 'a' budged out of Stoversville. Just a little whitewash on the dirt, and then mud, mud, mud!"

"She'll be right much glad to see you, I'm sure," said Georgia. "She likes company—no matter who it is. If she needs me right away, just tap that cow-bell on the chair. I'll be up d'rectly."

"Well, have a good time showin' little Tom all the skunk-trails and things. G'up there, Bobbins!"

Bobbins took hint from his rider's birch switch and thumped ahead at a brisk trot, his hoofs striking the bare spots under the pines like an irregular anvil-hammer. Georgia watched the bumpy silhouette loom disproportionately large for an instant against the portal of light at the crest of the road, like something fantastic and grotesque that bars the entrance of a tunnel. The portal of light marked the beginning of Sneed's cove and clearing. An instant later and the bobbing shape had dropped over it and out of sight. But the girl felt as if it somehow waited just beyond—ready to spring.

Fervently she hoped her mother might have no need of her during Mrs. Miggons' visit. She resolved to try to prolong her walk to the logical time of its termination. The woman herself had given her the hint—she could pretend she had gone all the way to fetch the mail from the post-boxes, though she knew there were no letters. If there had been, Boleman would have brought them up.

Boleman! First her mother and then she herself had driven him away this morning. But the snow had stopped falling. The portal of light at the crest of the road suggested a rift of sunbeams somewhere. By now he must be coming toward the house again on his way back to Stoversville. Perhaps he had relented and would bring the enclosure sure to be in Viney's letter.

An irresistible longing to speak with him again ere the day should end came over her. He had come to them generously, and all had gone wrong. She wanted to tell him she had fought and overcome her selfishness—to tell him she did not want him to be anything but honorable in his testimony in the lawsuit—though it might mean ruin for her father and stark want for his wife and children. Not even such cruel misfortune as this would equal the misfortune of any compromise in Boleman's unerring truthfulness. She saw it clearly now. In the shrine of her heart he was reinstated—upright, almost godlike, without a flaw. No misfortune averted could compensate the tainting of that image. She wanted to tell him that.

By turning and walking back far enough she might meet him somewhere on the road, shut off from all eyes behind the humped barrier of the hill. But that would compel her to pass her own house and be seen by Mrs. Miggons, who saw everything. She must leave the road, then, where it emerged from the hemlocks at its highest point. She must skirt the clearing in a wide semicircle round the hillside. Only that would keep her secure from Mrs. Miggons' prying eyes.

CARRYING little Tom, she climbed the steep fields, keeping to the edge of the woods. At every few steps in her ascent she looked back. The fields fell away behind her as she mounted, receding and untangling in rolling rhythms of white. And slow as was her progress, with the alert springy burden of little Tom to impede it, she began to feel the exhilaration of an eagle that mounts a ladder of resisting winds.

Each time she looked back it was on a prospect that added new detachment to widening vastnesses. Gone was the sense of being bound and fettered, which had been an oppression when she stood on the porch of the cabin, now a mere touch of black far below her. The humped wooded cone before it was belittled to something hardly more significant. The stroke of God's hand could brush that, too, away, as it would sweep away the numbered days

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and the trivial lives and struggles of those born in its shadow—lightly as the wind sweeps an oak-ball in its path.

Little Tom, warm and wary in the crook of her elbow, crowed, gurgled, clapped his hands. All the animal sounds and animal names in his repertory were not enough to gratify his instinct toward a jubilant articulateness. He invented new sounds, new names in his volubility.

"I believe you're a-turnin' Indian," Georgia told him, with dry drollness, as if she spoke to one of her own age and understanding. "You're turnin' into a little Cherokee, just because big sister married one."

THE Sneed farm lay like a rough-rounded fan opened out on the folds of the Knob, spreading nearly upright from the bottommost dip of the road. She climbed its curve toward its topmost scallop; and with each foot of the way some further shedding of her personal self lightened the incubus of her being. Each time she looked back she seemed to watch some detachment of herself float behind her—float and merge into the universal, like the tenuous smoke breath from the chimney so vague in the pit of the cove. She attained at last the highest point of the clearing. Before looking about for a log on which to rest, she turned, squarely facing the depths out of which she had mounted. Could a painter have seen her, he would have felt the vision of Raphael, limning his Madonna and Child above white clouds too heavy for the poise of feet that spurned their support.

Yet she was panting slightly, and warm human color surged on her cheek. She dusted the snow from a fallen poplar with the end of her shawl and sank gratefully and dandled little Tom to the ground. He was learning to walk, and she let him experiment, holding tightly to her hand. He pulled away from her by the length of her lithe, taut arm, and then staggered back just in time to fall headlong against her, gleeing and gurgling at the sport of it. Before starting out she had drawn heavy woolen stockings over his coarse little shoes. They were much too big and tripped him, plowing up quantities of snow. He deemed that a wondrous feat. The welkin rang with the ado he made.

"Look, Tom—look!" she cried. "Little winter ferns—green as if it were summertime!"

There they were, almost at their feet—a patch of live emerald, midmost of dried stalks of rabbit-hobble and horse-mint—a delicate verdure so clear that it looked translucent. The dead weeds rallied about it, hoarding and protecting it. Georgia thought of the instincts of dead forefathers, clambering from a grave to hoard and protect the clear honesty and purpose that may persist in a human soul waxing to a green, gemlike flame against cold and blight. These little ferns made her think of Boleman. Yes; and of Scawl, too— of Scawl, her sister's husband, whose Indian mother had sacrificed herself and died lest the white man, her lover, be degraded in the eyes of his people because of her. Scawl, too, was fine—in his silent, dreaming, mysterious way. How blind were all those who lived in the cove, far, far below such heights as this!

She heard distant bells of cattle roaming in the shelter of the valleys.

"That's our Hef," she told Tom, as her ear detached one particular timbre and pitch. "I reckon old Hef's had enough of the snow. I guess she's about decided to come on in home. Listen!"

Lips parted in a smile—dark eyes luminous as the wood shadows refracting the purples of the snow. Harkening thus, she seemed to hear all at once another sound, the timbre and pitch of which also she recognized—a fainter sound—faint, indeed, as an echo—a tinkle that might have been the ghost of some Hef that had failed to wander back—some Hef whose bones now bleached on the mountainsides. The smile left the girl's lips. She was not sure she did not merely imagine it.

"Hush, Tom—hush!" she gasped. "That sounds as if it might be maw ringin' for me to come."

He had, of course, no answer for her beyond the awe in his round eyes. He made out something amiss. He mistook her clutch for sudden harshness, and his lip quivered as he stared. She harkened again, her face set and white.

Then, unmistakably, there came to her the sound of her name, long-drawn, quavery-dim against the snow.

No—she was not to meet Boleman on the

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road. That far-away voice that shrilled through a trumpet out to her over the uplands was the voice of Mrs. Miggons. It was repeated and prolonged, sounding now all but inaudibly, now distinct, as if the summoner turned the trumpet in different directions at hazard against the hill and down along the road. A terror went through her. Something must be very wrong in the house below for Mrs. Miggons to call like that.

SHE caught up little Tom and ran straight down the breakneck slope. He began to cry, and his wails increased as she plunged headlong over the hazardous furrows, clogged or slippery with snow or ice. The cold which had been as nothing in the shelter of the woods was like a knife here on the open steeps. There seemed to be wind driving upward, dividing, roaring, protesting, closing again. She hurled herself against it. Once she stumbled to her knees, and the child's lamentations broke into a piercing scream. She uprighted herself, unconscious that it had happened. Her speed increased with the momentum of each second. She had no further sensation save one of falling slowly from a great height—with death grinning at the bottom, taking its time. And as she fell, all the days of her life spread out before her in a single, long, impersonal picture, together with a detached understanding that this was what always happened to people who dropped from precipices or folks who sank, drowning, under water.

In the pit, at the end of her fall, was Mrs. Miggons. She stood at the end of the porch at the foot of the loose board steps. Her muscular arms, arresting the momentum, were a deadening impact, as if the girl's body had indeed struck the ground. Knocked from the woman's hand, the trumpet fell with a clatter on the planks.

"Maw!" gasped the breath of the girl with no voice behind it. "Somethin's happened to maw. Let go of me—let go of me!"

"Now, now—just wait till ye've caught yer breath. Ye'll make her worse—rushin' in on top of her all white like that!"

"Let me go, Mrs. Miggons!"

"Not till ye get over bein' so scared. I tell ye she's all right. She gave me a little scare, too—but that's all over. She went off dead-like when I told her how my brother, yo' paw's lawyer, had good evidence that Bole Mayfield was to sell his testimony to the Johnstone Lumber Company for a big bunch o' money. But I ain't sorry I told her, 'cause it's somethin' you-all ought to know. It's good news for you-all, ye see. If my brother can prove the Johnstones is bribin' Bole Mayfield or any other witness, he can scare 'em into withdrawin' the suit. That 'd turn their lawyers into felons—don't ye see? I tried to comfort yer maw, makin' her see that—but she went off dead-like again, and after I brought her back the second time I thought I'd better call ye."

Mrs. Miggons was whispering fluently, with sidelong glances toward the room as she held the girl with viselike grip.

"Mrs. Miggons," said Georgia in a low monotone, "I tell you one last time to let me go."

"Well then, give me little Tom—let me hold little Tom for ye—and try to go in to her without actin' scary."

"Mrs. Miggons, if you touch little Tom I—I won't be responsible. I think I'd be equal to strikin' you dead."

There was a gleam in the girl's eye that just escaped insanity. The woman relaxed her hold. She moved dumbly aside. Already Georgia, pinned by the elbows, had pushed her slowly up the steps, along the porch, almost to the door.

Like a slender spring of powerful metal suddenly released, the girl's body now shot past her. Little Tom slid from her arms to the patched quilting at the foot of the bed.

"Maw—mother!" She had crumpled to her knees on the floor, and her arms were about her mother's languid face. "Mother—forgive me—oh just don't die—please, please don't die! I ain't been a good daughter to you, mother, but I will be from now on. I won't do what Viney done—I won't marry Bole Mayfield or no man you don't want—no man alive if you don't want me to, mother—just don't die—please, mother—and if paw loses his suit I'll work my fingers to the bone for you—and Lester's goin' on fourteen and can work for you, too—and all the little uns can help. Just promise me you won't die mother—please—please!"

Mrs. Miggons, listening on the porch,

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shook her head sardonically. "Jest excitin' her up all the worse," ran her mental comment. "Well, I sure tried to hold her back. Nobody can blame me if she kills her outright. I reckon the poor old overbreedin' soul would be better off dead, anyhow."

For in all things Mrs. Miggons was completely the philosopher. She mingled on in the affairs of her fellow creatures, stirring strife and discord rather from force of habit than from any thrill to be obtained. She brewed mischief automatically, without reward of personal stimulation—and remained the dispassionate observer.

CLARA DONBROOK brought Viney's letter to Boleman's cabin door. She knocked lightly. There was no answer. She heard the flames crackling on the hearth, but the stillness was so profound that she did not knock again. She thought he must have fallen asleep.

She tiptoed away, glancing at his window as she passed it. The single curtain of faded Canton flannel was drawn aside. She made bold to look in, meaning to tap on it if he were awake. He was awake, but he sat with his back to the window-light. A table was drawn up before him. It seemed to be piled high with papers. She could see he was utterly absorbed. No need to interrupt him yet. There had been an open sheet of writing for Georgia and one for Boleman from Scawl inside Viney's letter. But all that could wait.

For three hours Bole had been poring over the sorted contents of the oaken barrel. Nothing had been revealed save the pathos of distance—little vanished echoes of lives lived along White Wing before the Tobin branch railway westward from Asheville had penetrated the mountain fastnesses through the long winding of the Nantahala Valley, twenty miles away. Such messages as this:

DERE BOLE:—
i send you them 3 steers you asked to borry and hopin they will help you get out the tanbark all o k I beg to remain

yore frend
WADE MCKENNA

Or this:

Bole be sure and come to bear creek next Sunday week they's goin to be a big meetin and singin and purty gals from over santeetlah way and the gal i am goin to hitch with for life will be at the meetin too and they will be one for you to if yore heart aint broke to much about that pore girl Sadayi throwin herself away on old Scawl Tallotuskee and dyin like that and i beg to remain yores truly

JILES SNEED

Or this:

i write you these lines bole to let you know how i got religion becase my gal wont marry if i dont get religion beforehand and from now on i wont drink no more whisky and run after no more women and expect to change my way of life and bole i do wish you would get religion because it will sure make you happy even if you havent never drunk much whisky or run after no women and bole i am marryin my gal and settlin down to havin a famly next month and i think you otto do the same and stop mopin about pore Sadayi thats dead and cant never come back and i beg to remain yores truly

JILES SNEED

Tremendous flourishes this time after Jiles' signature. Boleman the Second smiled in spite of himself. Jiles had written this unusually long letter in a fervor of marital impulse and fresh-replenished godliness that had overflowed into the very twirling of his pencil.

These were of a type with the rest. There were letters from nearly everybody along White Wing of the earlier generation—letters from the aristocratic Hoopers, and from the Hunnicutts, at that time moonshiners and of evil repute, though, now that the youngest son had married Be'trice Hooper, they were said to be leading better lives. His father's friendships had been broad, accepting every man of whatsoever morals rank or repute for the good that was in him.

One or two well-worded missives in a fluent hand were dated "New York." They were from the father of poor Dumbarton Warren—that wild, handsome lad whom the world-war had cast like wreckage on Boleman's surveying-camp, where he had met his death.

Some of the letters were from girls—as a rule less ignorantly written, with shy willingness to be wooed and won to be read between their conventional lines. But there was no letter from the one of their number whom his father had married—perhaps after meeting her through Jiles Sneed himself at the Bear Creek meeting-house. And there were none from Sada'yi, to whom, as a very young, limitlessly ignorant and innocent boy, his father had believed himself mystically bound by secret

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rites of an old Cherokee medicine-man. All those, if there had ever been any, he must have destroyed.

Strange history! Sada'yi had left the white boy-husband and married the villainous old Cherokee, Tallotuskee, with proper license and the law behind the ceremony. She had owned vast tracts of timber-land in her own right. In purest self-sacrifice, his father had told him, she had made it impossible for him to claim her, because she believed the scandal of the union would bring ostracism upon him among his friends and kind. She had died when Scawl the Second was born, and old Scawl had claimed the child as his own—and many dwellers on White Wing had believed him to be the son of the elder Warren, the rich libertine from the great city in the North.

No written words in all these hoarded treasures of that secret marriage with its tragic ending! No—nor of the other and open one with an ending no less tragic—of the mother who had deserted husband and child—but Boleman had forgotten. There was the plush-framed portrait, made in Atlanta. Wincing with an undefined pain, he drew it forth from where he had covered it up.

What had she gone forth to seek? What call of freedom or of beauty had beckoned and betrayed her. The red plush told mutely of her wish to send back something bespeaking the elegance she must have pictured to herself before going forth from the mountains—her piteous false yearning, vague, crude, untried. The cheap thing told of that—no less than the cheap lace ruching in the square-cut bodice.

And the yearning could have found no fulfilment save in the tawdriness of which this plush frame, this square-cut cotton satin were the symbols, poignant as heartbreak. Death had been kind to her, overtaking her before the courage of that unrecking grope out toward something she mistook for fairer and finer had been cowed by understanding of what she had forfeited.

Or, had it? Was there not the beginning of fear in the eyes that looked out from this ill-taken photograph, larger than cabinet size? Was that callow, unfinished smile altogether the self-consciousness of a mountain girl in unaccustomed finery, bent on framing her grandeur in red plush and sending it back to the woods and hills to which she would return no more? Was there not the beginning of terror in the eyes?

This much could be said for her extenuation: the urge which had drawn her away had been at least courageous. Her light had been a false one—but she had followed it.

And she was his mother—more than the half of him! That erring instinct toward fulfilment that had driven her out upon the world coursed through his own veins. Corrected, perhaps—he prayed God that it might be so—transmuted by the alchemy of the father-strain, which knew no urge beyond the power of love and pain—love of these mountains and of his friends—pain and humiliation, successively repeated, which he had endured dumbly, unprotestingly, as he bore the blazing summer sun and the biting winter frosts. Had any inkling of that come to this restive girl dying among strangers on a hospital cot in a flat, fetid city?

Perhaps it had. Who could say but that it had flooded the passing of her soul as sunset sometimes flooded gray-blinking, bewildered heavens with glory resurgent on the mountain-crests? Who could say that she, too, had not known fulfilment?

THE glass that protected the photograph was cracked and splintered at one place. One jagged point dug into the cardboard where the bosom was bared with the cheap lace ruching about it.

Mayfield picked at the glass fragments. He held the picture upright and cautiously shook it, that the fragments might fall without damage to the moth-eaten frame. They clattered down on the table before him. He brushed them together and threw them into the fire. When he lifted the frame to gaze again at the picture, now free of defacing glass, a triangle of yellowish paper was visible, suspended beneath the plush base—shaken down from its lodgment behind the cardboard.

With trembling hands he drew it forth—three sheets of legal-cap paper, old-fashioned, with ruled lines, folded lengthwise and across.

On the blank side of the outer sheet, like

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directions written on an envelope, was tight-cramped, labored writing. Boleman read:

i will give this will to my son Boleman when he comes of age i will keep it behind Delias pictur for a safe place i ask my son boleman not to claim the property and timber land wrote down on this will but to give it all to his brother Scawl because its his by right and ought to belong to him from his mother but maybe somebody may try to take it away from Scawl and this will of Sadayis will be like a club for my son boleman to get it back for him

his mark
BOLEMAN CLAY X MAYFIELD
his mark
(wrote out for him by his friend, Jiles Sneed)

On the blank side of the second sheet a postscript had been added:

I ask my sons boleman and scawl to be honest enuf to give to Jiles Sneed that 10 acres of timber on Sneeds Knob because it was part of the old sneed land owned by his grandaddy and the u s govt had not no right to decide the boundary agin Jiles and to say the property belonged to indian lands in 1885 i also ask my sons to do this because Jiles Sneed has been good to me and many a time has give me money and provisions for me and my baby son boleman

And again the pathos of "his mark."

And now, instead of a pinhole of trickling light that had been the limit of Boleman's hope, it was as if a great door in his memory swung wide.

Now clear-cut and tangible were the shadowy things that had so persistently eluded him. There had been a fire in Stoversville court-house from the collapse of an old stove that had been fed to melting heat. They had put it out; but some papers and records had been burned. Boleman, anxious to entertain his sick father with all the news, had told him about it, had described how they had built a bonfire in a snow-drift outside and douched the flames in the small room with bucketfuls of melted snow. And his father, partially paralyzed since several days, yet alertly interested in everything, had seemed disturbed. He had managed to speak the word "picshure" clearly enough for them to know he meant "picture." He had repeated the word "flame" over and over. They thought he alluded to the fire. But he had meant "frame"—picture-frame!

Boleman knew now that this utterance had been subconsciously on his mind through the intervening years. That was why the tintypes had first engrossed him—searching for the lost memory. His father had realized how the fire might have destroyed the filed replica of Sada'yi's will. She had sacrificed herself for him, marrying old Tallotuskee, earning grim, silent bitterness of the boy until the grown man had come to understand—and she had tried to give him all her lands before she died.

The three sheets of legal cap were her last will and testament witnessed, written out, sealed and signed by hands long dust. It had never been heard of because its replica had been among those burned, as his father feared it might be. It must have been delivered and read to his father after Sada'yi had died.

But she who had made it was but a Cherokee, and the grasping old Cherokee she had married, his hands reputed to be red with the murder of two earlier wives, would have contested it. His father had no doubt asked for silence, and been granted silence by the two or three who had known of its existence. Among that two or three had been Jiles.

Now, too, Boleman could understand the chiefest source of Jiles' hatred toward himself and Scawl. He must have believed all along that they knew of the will—must have been too proud to mention it or ask any favor about a title to the land. That was the way of the mountaineer.

As Jiles would look at it, they had been cheating him of his rights—and one of them had brought disgrace upon him, marrying his daughter, and the other had aided and abetted. No doubt he believed they had divided the Johnstone payment between them, but he had spoken no word. Too proud. Proud, like the granite o'erhanging Bald Stone beyond his ancestral clearing. Proud—yet determined to fight in the law-courts—to fight with every drop of his blood—to fight with blackest ruin as the price in any outcome. That was the way of the mountaineer.

CLARA had deemed the great news about Viney and Scawl could wait because Boleman seemed so busy. But when Wade McKenna returned with ill news about Mrs. Sneed, that could not wait.

She had sent her brother astride the old horse, June, with chicken broth in a milk-can and instructed him to slip the messages

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from Seattle into the girl's hand, cautioning him to do or say nothing that would excite her mother. Wade had started out early after the midday dinner. He came back as the first dark was settling over Little White Wing valley and burst into the living-room of the lower dwelling.

"Clara—Chester—wrop yourselves up warm—wrop little Chester up warm—get out the other horses and come! Mrs. Sneed's a-dyin' and asks to see us all. I rode on to the school and brought all the children home to her. She wants to see Boleman, too—I'll go out and tell him."

He found Boleman seated before the dying embers of his fire, his lamp unlighted. He told him that Georgia's mother was dying and was set on the notion of seeing them all.

"Eh?" murmured Boleman, hardly stirring, dazed by meditation. "Dyin', you say? And asks to see me, too?"

"Ye more'n anybody else, Bole. It seems to be most on her mind to see ye."

Boleman rose, shivering slightly like one just wakened.

"Thank—God—for—that—Wade! It's more than I hoped." The fervor came low from his lips—a true prayer. "Now I can tell her good news before she goes—good news with my own lips, Wade. That Johnstone case against Jiles is goin' to be withdrawn. They're a-goin' to be blamed glad to withdraw it, Wade—glad to do anything I say—glad even to get the chance to pay poor old Jiles somethin' for his lost time and worryin'—when I say the word—and Scawl says it with me. I'm goin' to send for Scawl, Wade—to say it with me. I've found a weapon against them, Wade—a weapon—for Scawl and me." That was all. No shock or horror that this mother of so many little children lay dying—not even surprise.

For hours he had sat before this dying fire, musing on death. And now Wade had come out to him and told him that Mrs. Sneed was dying. It was like the resolving of a ceaseless, low-vibrating chord, sustaining his meditations whenever they spread wings toward the Infinite. It was like a kind of mellow glory tolled in the vast requiems of nature. Death was fulfilment—it was the light that engulfed light, as the sun engulfs the light of a candle.

"We're all a-goin' to her together," he heard Wade saying, and Wade's voice sounded immensely far away to him. "And Jiles is bein' sent for. Kate Miggons is ridin' hard as ever she can, twenty miles to the railroad to telegraph for Jiles at the loggin' works down in Nantahala. God knows I've got good call to hate the woman—but when I saw how she jumped on that nag and rode out in the cold and the night and the wind and the darkness—jist hear it, Bole, the way that wind's comin' up—the way it always comes up winter-times—round night-time——"

"It's just an ordinary winter wind," said Bole, making ready.

"Kate Miggons—it's strange how them things be, Bole—I couldn't find no hate left agin her when I saw her ride out like that for a dyin' woman. And didn't Clara tell ye, Bole? Viney and Scawl's wrote they was comin' back—comin' back to save Viney's daddy from the lawsuit if they could. They was to start from Seattle right after they wrote it—for all we know they may be crossin' from the railroad to Stoversville by now—for all we know they may get horses and be ridin' out toward Sneed's Knob by now!"

THE mother of Georgia and Viney told the weeping children and the friends assembled at her wish about her bed that she would not die that night. She would keep alive until her husband could get to her from the logging works.

Some inexplicable strength seemed to sustain her, as if drawn from sources outside herself, by hands that picked, picked, never stopping, on the faded bright patchwork of the quilts as she talked on and on. They did not seem to be hers—these warped, bony, mechanically picking hands. Her voice was steady and distinct. Never had any of her children or the others about her heard her thoughts so clearly spoken.

"The first time I ever seed him," she told them, "was when I was 'leven years old, standin' by the spring-house, wringin' out the washin'. He crossed around below, behind the house, and I looked onct at him and knowed he was my man. He was on some business with pappy, and he didn't come up to where I was standin' at the wash-kettle with maw. He never saw me at all. I never knowed his name and I

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didn't ask it. I jist said to my mother, 'Maw,' I jist said, 'there goes my man!'

"Maw thought I was jokin', and laughed fit to kill herself at a child like me makin' such a smart joke. 'You've picked a good 'un,' she says, laughin' till she nearly cried. 'That Jiles Sneed! Ten year older'n ye, and the wildest feller on White Wing or Bear Creek or Santeely!' Maw told it ever'where round, and ever'body laughed at me.

"He heard the big joke-story about my callin' him 'my man'—and he axed to see me next time he come over to our place—and he brought me a pocketful of early June apples—they'd ripened down in the sun on Nantahala, while our old tree, top o' the ridge, was still a-bloomin'. I climbed and got a branch of apple blossoms and set one of them ripe little apples right among the flowers—and that made him laugh so loud I could hear it ringin' after he was gone—and on in the night—like chimes ringin' in the schoolhouse steeple on Sunday when the sun shines.

"The story was told on me till it got to plaguin' me—but I stuck to it. *'That's my man,'* I kep' on sayin' whenever I saw him a little ways off so he couldn't hear...

"We was married afore I was quite turned sixteen. He got religion so as to marry me—and he quit drinkin' whisky and never went about no bad women no more.

"I've bore him ten children—and would bear him ten more and never complain if I had the strength—but ever'thin' 's all right. All my life since I first growed up I've had my man. I've had my griefs, too—but they don't look like griefs to me now. Nothin's ever give me no right to complain. I've been happy as a woman could ask to be.

"Ever' woman's got the right to have her man. That's what I'd forgot until—but wait till I can tell you-all what I saw and heard this day. I had forgot, ye see. Work and cold and heat and hardship year after year, and havin' new children or nussin' and tendin' them I had already—all that dulled me and made me forget, though I'd knowed it when I was a little child and first seen my man.

"But I heard and saw what I heard and saw to-day—and it all came back to me—clear as light from the sky. I'd been hatin' Bole here, and eatin' my heart out 'cause I was sure I'd seed the signs Georgia loved him. Then Kate Miggons rode over to see me—and while she was tellin' me how her brother thought Bole was sure to ruin us, it was like I went a way way off from here—like I was lifted right up out of my body. I walked along streets that was all gold—gold as that locket of Clara's—exactly like the preachers has always said it would be—in heaven. But I couldn't see wings or no angels—though I looked round everywhere to find 'em. I reckon I wasn't ready for that yet. I could hear 'em murmurin', though jist like leaves rustle on the mountains in summer-time—and through the big rustle of wings roundabouts I heard a great voice jist like the wind a-blowin'—*'Whom God hath joined together let nobody put asunder'*—a voice jist like that wind—listen to that wind!"

THE dying woman paused. The roar up the cove struck the hill, swirled about the house, shaking it as if it would lift it from its frail foundations. But no one stirred. Nobody was even frightened. The listeners waited for her to go on.

"Then I come back—I dropped like a dead weight back down into this body—and I knowed all at onct what them wind-words meant. They didn't mean jist bein' married—they meant that God joined the woman when she found and knowed *her man*. He joined 'em first before the preacher did it. He had joined Georgie and Boleman already, because she found him like I done with Jiles—she knowed Bole for *her man*. It was plain to me.

"Kate Miggons saw me go away, off to heaven, and got scared. Then, when she was flyin' round like a chicken with its head cut off, thinkin' she was bringin' me to, I went right up into the golden streets agin. I heard God's voice agin—and He spoke a lot of things I couldn't understand, 'cause the words was big Bible words, like a parson sayin' off a long text too fast—but at last I could make out that He was scoldin' me for the way I still felt about Viney—jist because He'd joined her to her man—and scoldin' me for bein' about to do it all over agin with Georgie. And I made out that He was advisin' me to go back and stay long enough this time to make ever'thing all right—to go back and

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For three hours Bole had been poring over the sorted contents of the oaken barrel. Nothing had been revealed save the pathos of distance.

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remember how I'd had my man—and Viney had had her man—and Georgie must have hers—and a great big love filled my heart. And then no sooner was I back than pore little Georgie came rushin' in and fell down beside my bed and offered to give up her man if I'd jist live——

"No—Georgie honey—ye needn't give up yer man. That lawsuit's God's extry outside business. It ain't got nothin' to do with His joinin' you and Boleman like He's done already—your man—his woman. He's done it already—the parson can only jist finish it off like he does when he baptizes people after they've done got religion already. And better, more comf'table things are ahead of everybody, too—better things for all along White Wing—that lawsuit don't matter—it don't matter if Jiles loses the farm—they'll build the great loggin' plant in the old Tallotuskee fields—and there'll be good pay for ever'body, and warm stoves and good things to eat and plenty all round Atoah Peak, and papers and magazines for ever'body to read—and better schools for the children to get to be fine, educated men like Boleman and Mr. Donbrook—I see it all—it was all spread before me in them streets of yaller gold—jist like the promised land was spread out before Moses. Your man, Georgie—your man!

"And I'll live till Jiles come—I'll live till my man gets back to me from Nantahala—I'll say good-by for a little while to my man—and then my life 'll stretch back before me—perfect—all it could 'a' been if I'd been one of them empresses I've heard tell on, with gold houses to live in and thousands to stand around and jist hand 'em all they want to eat without their havin' to raise it from the seed out of the hard ground, and tend it and nuss it and then cook it between nussin'-times of the children. I don't envy them rich queens—I've had my man—" She became gently delirious then, and murmured soft incoherencies about Viney and Scawl.

THEY came to her—the slim, silent Indian, still with the face of a dreaming poet, and the fair-haired girl with the prophecy of early motherhood exalting her eyes with a light deep and blue and tender through her tears. They came out of the night and the wind in their travel-stained garments. Their mother's consciousness rallied, though she seemed not to realize they had not been all the time among those about her bed. But she told them again the story of all she had heard and learned in the empty, wing-rustling golden streets of heaven—her version and interpretation of God's great plan of fulfilment. It was as if she could not repeat it often enough.

Time stopped for the watchers. It might have been hours or days, moments or years. The purple-red of winter daybreak trembled through the pallor of fading stars behind Atoah, and a minute arc of the sun glistened like a tiny cluster of rubies and topaz in the notch of its peak. The cluster spread—melting the jewels—liquifying them into clean flame.

As the rays opened to a vast sheaf, bound at its base by a wisp of cloud, outleaping over all the sky like a fanfare of trumpets, Jiles Sneed swung down from his foam-flecked mule and rushed across the patch of weed-spiked snow between the road and the house. The dying woman heard him, though they who watched had thought her sleeping. They beheld a miracle. She sat upright at the first light crunching on the snow. When his footsteps cluttered on the boards of the porch, she rose to her knees, erect in her coarse white robe, her arms yearning out. For in that supreme moment life and strength had flooded back to her in all its fulness.

Close to her cheek she held the lean, set-jawed face, with its parched wrinkles, its stubble of gray beard.

"Jiles," she said, mothering him, stanching the flow of his tears with the back of her knotted hands; "my man—Jiles—there ain't nothin' to cry over. Life's give me all it could—it's give me you—it all comes to reapin' and harvest like the wheat in the field—gold-smellin' and sweet—like that red meller June apple I set agin the apple blossoms the second time I ever laid eyes on ye—Jiles—my man—my man——"

She fell back. He let her sink, still, among the faded patchwork and the coarse cotton pillows.

Fulfilment! Boleman Mayfield's lips formed the word, formed the thought—fulfilment—the eternal light of creative life engulfing the pervasive, tender luminance of death as the sun engulfs the flicker of a candle-flame.

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The Picture-Book

A Story about Children Which Grown-ups May Enjoy and from Which They May Learn. The First of Several Contributions from a Distinguished English Author Which Are to Appear in Everybody's

By Hugh Walpole

SEPTEMBER first was Mary's birthday, and it had always something of a melancholy air about it, because it meant that the holidays were drawing to a close. Soon there would be the last bathe, the last picnic, the last plunge across the moor, the last waking to the sharp, poignant cry of the flying, swerving gulls.

Then, in strange, sudden fashion, like the unclicking of a door that opens into another room, the summer had suddenly slipped aside, giving place to autumn—not full autumn yet, only a few leaves turning, a few fires burning in the fields, the sea only a little colder in color, the sky at evening a chillier green, but the change was there and with it Polchester, and close behind Polchester old Thompson stepped toward them.

Yes; Mary's birthday marked the beginning of the end, and, in addition to that, there was the desperate, urgent question of present-giving. Mary took her present-giving—or, rather, present-getting—with the utmost seriousness. No one in the whole world minded quite so desperately as she what she got, who gave it her, and how it was given. Not that she was greedy. Indeed, no! She was not like Helen, who guessed the price of everything that she received, and had what Uncle Samuel called "a regular shop-mind."

It was all sentiment with Mary. What she wanted was that some one—any one—should love her, and therefore give her something. She knew that Uncle Samuel did not love her, and she suffered not, therefore, the slightest unhappiness did he forget her natal day, but she would have cried for a week had Jeremy forgotten it. She did not mind did Jeremy only spend sixpence on his gift—but he was a generous boy, and always spent everything that, at the moment, he had—so that she might be sure that he had taken a little trouble in the buying of it.

Jeremy knew all this well enough, and in earlier years the question of buying had been simple, because Cow Farm was miles from anywhere, the nearest village being the fishing-cove of Rafiel, and Rafiel had only one "shop general," and the things in this shop general were all visible in the window from year's end to year's end. Mary, therefore, received on her birthday something with which, by sight at least, she was thoroughly familiar.

Now, this year there were new conditions. The nearest village with shops was St. Mary's Moor, some six miles away. It was true that the purchase must be made, and in any case it would be, on this occasion, a real novelty. Jeremy tried to discover by those circumlocutory but self-revealing methods peculiar to intending present-givers what Mary would like. Suppose—just suppose—that some one, one day, were to die and, most unexpectedly, leave a lot of money to Mary, what would she buy?

This was the kind of game that Mary adored, and she entered into it thoroughly. She would buy an enormous library, thousands and thousands of books; she would

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buy a town and fill it with sweet shops, and then put hundreds of poor children into it to eat as much as they liked; she would buy Polchester Cathedral and make father bishop.

This was flying rather too high, and so Jeremy, somewhat precipitately, asked her what she would do were she given fifteen shillings and sixpence. She considered, and being that morning in a very Christian frame of mind, decided that she would give it to Miss Jones to buy a new hat with. Mentally cursing girls and their tiresome ways, Jeremy, outwardly polite, altered his demand to: "No; but suppose you were given five shillings and threepence halfpenny"—the exact sum saved at that moment by him—"and had to spend it for yourself, Mary, what would you get with it?"

She would get a book.

Yes; but what book? She clasped her hands and looked to heaven. Oh, there were so many that she wanted. She wanted "The Young Stepmother" and "Dynevor Terrace" and "The Scottish Chiefs" and "Queechy" and "Sylvie and Bruno" and "The Queen's Maries" and—and—hundreds and hundreds.

Well, she couldn't buy hundreds with five and threepence halfpenny—that was certain—and if she thought that he was going to she was very much mistaken—but at least he had got his answer. It was a book that she wanted.

THE next thing was to go into St. Mary's Moor. He found the opportunity ready to his hand, because Miss Jones had to go to buy some things that were needed for the family the very next afternoon. He would go with her. Mary thought that she would go, too, and when Jeremy told her, with an air of great mystery, that that was impossible, she looked so self-conscious that he could have smacked her.

The journey in the old ramshackle omnibus was a delightful adventure. It happened on this particular afternoon that all the Caerleon farmers and their wives were going, too, and there was a "fine old crush." Hamlet, fixed tightly on his lead, sat between his master's legs, his tongue out, his hair on end and his bright eyes wicked, darting from place to place. He saw so many things that he would like to do—parcels that he would like to worry, legs that he would like to smell, laps that he would like to investigate.

He gave sudden jerks at the lead, suited himself to the rolling and jolting of the 'bus so that he should be flung as near as possible to the leg, parcel or lap that he most wished to investigate. Jeremy then was very busy. Miss Jones, who was a good woman and, by now, thoroughly appreciated by all the members of the Cole family, including Jeremy himself, who always took her under his special protection when they went out anywhere, had in all her years never learned that first of all social laws: "Never try to talk in a noisy vehicle," and had a long story about one Edmund Spencer, from whose mother she had that morning received a letter. She always treated Jeremy as a friend and contemporary—one of the reasons for his liking of her—and he was always deeply interested in her histories, but to-day, owing to the terrific rumblings, rattlings, and screaming of the 'bus, and to the shrieking and shouting of the farmers and their ladies, he could only catch occasional words and was not sure, at the end of it all, whether Edmund Spencer were animal, vegetable or mineral. His confusion was complete when, just as they were rattling into St. Mary's one and only street, Miss Jones screamed into his ear, "And so they had to give her boiled milk four times a day and nothing else except an occasional potato."

The omnibus drew up in front of the Dog and Rabbit, and every one departed on their various affairs. St. Mary's was like a little wayside station on the edge of a vast brindled, crinkled moorland, brown and gray and green rucking away to the smooth pale egg-shell blue of the afternoon sky. The sea-wind came ruffling up to them where they stood. What storms of wind and rain there must be in the winter! All the houses of the long, straggling street seemed to be blown a bit askew.

Jeremy and Miss Jones looked round them, and at once the inevitable "general" sprang to view. Miss Jones had to go into the hotel about some business for the rectory and, telling Jeremy to stay just where he was and that she wouldn't be more than "just five minutes," vanished. Having been told to stay where he was, it was natural of him to wander down the

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street, inspect a greasy pond with some ducks, three children playing marbles and two mongrel dogs, and then flatten his nose against the window of the "general."

Inspection proved very disappointing. There seemed to be nothing here that he could possibly offer to Mary—boot-laces, cards of buttons, mysterious articles of underwear, foggy bottles containing bulls'-eyes, sticks of liquorice, cakes of soap, copies of *Home Chat* and the *Woman's Journal*, some pairs of very dilapidated-looking slippers, some walking-sticks, portraits of Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales, highly-colored——

None of these. Unless, possibly, the royal family. But no! Even to Jeremy's untrained eye the color was a *little* bright, and old Victoria— No; Mary wanted a book.

He stared up and down the street in great agitation. He must buy *something* before Miss Jones came out of the inn. He did not want her to see what it was that he bought. The moments were slipping by. There was *nothing* here. The two half-crowns and the threepenny piece in his tightly clenched palm were hot and sticky. He looked again. There really was *nothing!*

Then, staring down the street toward the open moor and the eventual sea, he saw a little bulging, bottle-glass window that seemed to have colored things in it. He turned and almost ran.

It was the last shop in the street, and a funny, dumpty, whitewashed cottage with a pretty garden on its seaward side. The bottle-glass window protected the strangest things.

In the shop window there were glasses of blue with tapering stems, and squat old men smoking pipes, painted in the gayest colors, and natty jugs to drink out of, and there were old chains of beaten and figured silver, and golden boxes, and the model of a ship with full sails and a gorgeous figurehead of red and gold, and there were old pictures in dim frames, and a piece of a colored rug, and lots and lots of other things as well.

JEREMY pushed the door back, heard a little bell tinkle above his head, and at once was in a shop so crowded that it was impossible to see t'other from which. A young man with a pale face and carroty hair was behind the very high counter—so high that Jeremy's nose just tipped the level of it.

"Have you got such a thing as a book?" he asked very politely.

The young man smiled.

"What sort of book?"

"Well, she *said* she wanted 'Queechy' or 'Sylvie and Bruno' or—I've forgotten the names of the others. You haven't got those two, I suppose?"

"No, I haven't," said the young man, quite grave now.

"Have you got *any* books?" said Jeremy breathlessly, because time was slipping by and he had to stand on his toes.

"I've got this old Bible," said the young man, producing a thick, heavy volume with brass clasps. "You see, it's got rather fine pictures. I think you'd better sit on this," he added, producing a high stool. "You'll be able to see better."

"Oh, that's very nice!" said Jeremy, fascinated by Moses twisting a serpent round his very muscular arm as though it were a piece of string. "How much is this?"

"Eight pounds and ten," said the young man, as though he'd said a halfpenny.

"I think I'd better tell you at once," said Jeremy, leaning his elbows confidentially on the counter, "that I've only got five shillings and threepence halfpenny."

The young man scratched his head.

"I doubt if we've got any book—" he began; then suddenly, "Perhaps this will be the very thing—if you like pictures."

He burrowed deep down in the back somewhere and produced two or three long, flat-looking books, dusty and a faded yellow. He wiped them with a cloth and presented them to Jeremy. At the first sight of them he knew that they were what he wanted. He read the titles. One was "Robinson Crusoe," another "The Swiss Family Robinson," the third "Masterman Ready." He looked at "Crusoe" and gave a delighted squeal of ecstasy as he turned over the pages. The print was funny and blacker than he had ever seen print before; the pictures were colored—and *richly* colored, the reds and greens and purples sinking deep into the page. Oh, it was a lovely book—a perfect book—the very, very thing for Mary!

"How much is it?" he asked, trembling before the answer.

"Exactly five shillings and threepence

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halfpenny," said the young man gravely.

"That *is* strange," said Jeremy, almost crowing with delight and keeping his hand on the book unless it should suddenly melt away. "That's just what I've got. Isn't that lucky?"

"Very fortunate indeed," said the young man. "Shall I wrap it up for you?"

"Oh, yes; please do—and very carefully, please, so nobody can guess what it is."

The young man was very clever at this, and when he emerged from the back of the shop he had with him a parcel that might easily have been a ship or a railway train.

Jeremy paid his money, climbed down from his stool, then held out his hand.

"Good-by," he said. "Thank you. I'll come again one day and look at the other things in your shop."

"Please do," said the young man, bowing.

He went out, the little bell tinkling gaily behind him, and there, coming at that very moment out of the inn, was Miss Jones.

WE ALL know the truth of the familiar proverb that "distance lends enchantment to the view," and it was never more true of anything in the world than of parcels.

All the way back in the 'bus the book grew and grew in magnificence, simply because Jeremy could not see it. He clutched the parcel tightly on his knees and resisted all Miss Jones' attempts to discover its contents. Back in the rectory, he rushed up to his bedroom, locked the door and then, with trembling fingers, undid the paper.

The first glimpse of Robinson Crusoe and the footprint in the sand thrilled him so that the whitewashed walls of his room faded away and the thin, pale evening glow passed into a sky of burning blue, and a scarlet cockatoo flew screaming above his head and the sand lay hot and sugar-brown at his feet. Mystery was there—the footprint in the sand and Crusoe, with his shaggy beard and peaked hat, staring——

Feverishly his fingers turned the pages, and picture after picture opened for his delight. He had never before seen a book with so many pictures, pictures so bright and yet so true, pictures so real that you could almost touch the trees and the figures and Crusoe's hatchet. He knelt then on the floor, the book spread out upon the bed, so deeply absorbed that it was with a terrific jolt that he heard the banging on the door and Mary's voice:

"Aren't you coming, Jeremy? We're half through supper. The bell went hours ago."

Mary! He had forgotten all about her. Of course this book was for her. Just the book for her! She would love the pictures. He had forgotten all about——

He went down to supper and was bewildered and absent-minded throughout the meal. That night his dreams were all of Crusoe, of burning sands and flaming skies, of the crimson cockatoo and Man Friday. When he woke he jumped at once out of bed and ran on naked feet to the book. As a rule, the next morning is the testing-time, and too often we find that the treasure that we bought the day before has already lost some of its glitter and shine. Now it was not so. The pictures had grown better and better, richer and ever more rich. The loveliest pictures——

Just the book for Mary! It was then, standing half stripped before his basin, pausing, as he always did ere he made the icy attack with the sponge, that he realized his temptation. He did not want to give the book to Mary. He wanted to keep it for himself.

While he dressed the temptation did not approach him very closely. It was so horrible a temptation that he did not look it in the eyes. He was a generous little boy, had never done a mean thing in all his life. He was always eager to give anything away, although he had a strong and persistent sense of possessions, so that he loved to have his things near him and they seemed to him—his books and his toys and his football—as alive as the people round him. He had never felt anything so alive as this book was.

When he came down to breakfast he was surprised to find that the sight of Mary made him feel rather cross. She always had, in excess of others, the capacity for irritating him, as she herself well knew. This morning she irritated him very much. Her birthday would be four days from now. He would be glad when it arrived; he could give her the book and the temptation would be over. Indeed, he would like to give her the book now and have done with it.

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By the middle of the day he was considering whether he could not give her something else "just as good" and keep the book for himself. He wrapped the book in all its paper, but ran up continually to look at it. She would like something else just as much; she would like something else more. After all, "Robinson Crusoe" was a book for boys. But the trouble was that he had now no money. He would receive threepence on Saturday, the last Saturday before Mary's birthday, but what could you get with threepence? Five shillings of the sum with which he had bought Mary's present had been given him by Uncle Samuel—and Uncle Samuel's next present would be the tip before he went to school.

THAT afternoon he quarreled with Mary—for no reason at all. He was sitting under the oak tree on the lawn, reading "Redgauntlet." Mary came and asked him whether she could take Hamlet for a run. Hamlet, as though he were a toy dog made of springs, was leaping up and down. He did not like Mary, but he adored a run.

"No, you can't," said Jeremy.

"Oh, Jeremy, why can't I? I'll take the greatest care of him, and those horrid little boys are gone away now, and——"

"You can't, because I say you can't."

"Oh, Jeremy, do let——"

He started up from his chair, all rage and indignation.

"Look here, Mary; if you go on talking——"

She walked away down the garden, her head hanging in that tiresome way it had when she was unhappy. Hamlet tried to follow her, so he called him back. He came, but was quite definitely in the sulks, sitting, his head raised, very proud, wrath in his eyes, snapping angrily at an occasional fly.

"Redgauntlet" was spoiled for Jeremy. He put the book down and tried to placate Hamlet, who knew his power and refused to be placated. Why didn't he let Mary take Hamlet? What a pig he was! He would be nice to Mary when she came back. But when she did return that face of hers, with its beseeching look, irritated him so deeply that he snapped at her more than before.

After all, "Robinson Crusoe" *was* a book for boys——

Two days later he had decided quite definitely that he could not part with it. He must find something else for her, something very fine indeed, the best thing that he had. He thought of every possible way of making money, but time was so short and ways of making money quickly were so few. He thought of asking his father for the pocket-money of many weeks in advance, but it would have to be so very many weeks in advance to be worth anything at all, and his father would want to know what he needed the money for. He thought of selling something; but there was no place to sell things, and he had not anything that any one else wanted. He thought of asking his mother; but she would send him to his father, who always managed the family finances.

He went over all his private posessions. The trouble with them was that Mary knew them all so well.

Impossible to pretend that there was anything there that she could want! He collected the most hopeful of them and laid them out on the bed—a pocket-knife, three books, a photograph-frame (rubbed at the edges), a watch-chain that had seemed at first to be silver but now most certainly wasn't, a leather pocketbook, a red blotting-pad—not a very brilliant collection.

He did not now dare look at the book at all. He put it away in the bottom of the chest of drawers. He thought that perhaps, if he did not see it or take it out of its brown paper until the actual day, it would be easier to give. But he had imagination, as, in later years, he was to find to his cost, and the book grew and grew in his mind, the pictures flaming like suns, the spirit of the book smiling at him, saying to him, with confidential friendship: "We belong to one another, you and I. No one shall part us."

Then Helen said to him,

"What are you going to give Mary on her birthday?"

"Why?" he asked suspiciously.

"I only wanted to know. I've got mine. Every one knows you went into St. Mary's and bought something. Mary herself knows."

That was the worst of being part of a family. Every one knew everything.

"Perhaps it wasn't for Mary," he said.

Helen sniffed.

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"Of course, if you don't want to tell me," she said, "I don't care to know."

Then he discovered the little glass bottle with the silver stopper. It had been given him two years ago on his birthday by a distant cousin who happened to be staying with them at the time. What anybody wanted to give a boy a glass bottle with a stopper for, Jeremy couldn't conceive. Mary had always liked it, had picked it up and looked at it with longing. Of course she knew that it had been his for two years. He looked at it, and, even as Adam years ago with the apple, he fell.

MARY'S birthday came, and with it a day of burning, glowing color. The first early-autumn mists were hanging like veils of thinly sheeted bronze before the grass wet with heavy dew, the sky of azure, the sea crystal-pale. In the mist, the rectory was a giant box of pearl. The air smelled of distant fires.

On such a day who would not be happy, and Mary was perhaps the happiest little girl in the kingdom. Happy as she was, she lost much of her plainness, her eyes sparkling behind her glasses, her mouth smiling—something tender and poignant in her, some distant prophecy of the maturity in her, one day beautifully to be fulfilled, coming forth in her, because she felt that she was beloved, even though it were only for an hour. She was lucky in her presents. Her mother gave her a silver watch, a little darling, quite small, with the hours marked in blue on the face. Her father gave her a silver watch-chain, so thin that you thought that it would break if you looked at it, and in reality so strong that not the strongest man in the world could break it. Aunt Mary gave her a muff, soft and furry, and Helen gave her a red-leather blotter, and Uncle Samuel sent her a book, the very "Dynevon Terrace" that she wanted—how *did* he know? And Miss Jones gave her a work-basket with the prettiest silk lining inside you ever saw, and a pair of gloves from Barbara, and—a glass bottle with a silver stopper from Jeremy!

It seemed that she liked this last present best of all. She rushed up to Jeremy and kissed him in the wettest possible way.

"Oh, Jeremy, I *am* so glad! That's *just* what I wanted! I've never seen such a darling! I've never had any silver things to stand on my table, and Gladys Sampson has such a lot. And this is prettier than any that Gladys has. Oh, mother, *do* look! See what Jeremy's given me! Father, see what Jeremy's given me! Isn't it pretty, Miss Jones? You are a *dear*, Jeremy, and I'll have it all my life!"

Jeremy stood there, his heart like lead. It may be said with truth of him that never in his whole existence had he felt such shame as he did now. Mean, mean, mean! Suddenly, now that it was too late, he hated that book up-stairs, lying safely in his bottom drawer. He didn't want ever to look at it again.

And Mary. She must *know* that this was his old glass bottle that he had had so long. She had seen it a hundred times. It is true that he had rubbed it up and got the woman in the kitchen to polish the silver, but still she must *know*. He looked at her with new interest. Was it all acting, this enthusiasm? No; it was not. She was genuinely moved and delighted. Was she pretending to herself that she had never seen it before, forcing herself to believe that it was new? He would keep the book and give it to her at Christmas. But that would not be the same thing. The deed was done now—the shabby, miserable deed.

He did everything that he could to make her birthday a happy one. He was with her all the day. He allowed her to read to him a long piece of the story that she was then writing—a very tiresome business, because she could not read her own script and because there were so many characters that he could never keep track of any of them. He went blackberrying with her in the afternoon and gave her all the best blackberries. But nothing could raise his spirits. The beautiful day said nothing to him. He felt sick in the evening from eating too many blackberries and went to bed directly after supper.

The days that followed could hardly help but be jolly, because the weather was so lovely—still, breathless days—when the world seemed to be painted in purple and blue on a wall of ivory, when the sea came over the sand with a ripple of utter content, when the moon appeared early in the evening, a silver bow, and mounted gently into a sky thick with stars, when every sound—the rattle of carts, the barks of dogs, the cries of men—struck the air

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sharply like blows upon iron. Yet, though the world was so lovely and every one, even Aunt Amy, was in the best and most contented of tempers, something hung over Jeremy like a black, heavy cloth. His pride in himself was gone. He had done something shabby.

He continued to see Mary with new eyes. She was a decent kid. He looked back over the past months and saw how much more decent she had been to him than he had been to her. She had been irritating, of course, but then that was because she was a girl. All girls were irritating. Meanwhile, he never glanced at the book again.

ONE day Mary received a postal order for ten shillings. This was a present from an aunt in America who had suddenly remembered Mary's birthday. Filled with glee and self-importance, she went in to St. Mary's with Miss Jones to spend it.

That evening, when Jeremy was washing his hands there was a knock on his door, and Mary's voice.

"May I come in?"

"Yes," he said.

She came in, her face colored with mysterious purpose, in her hands she held a parcel.

"Oh, are you washing your hands, Jeremy?" she said, her favorite opening in conversation being always a question of the obvious. The red evening sunlight flooded the room.

"What is it?" Jeremy asked rather crossly.

She looked at him pleadingly, as though begging him to save her from the difficulties of emotion and explanation that crowded in upon her.

"Oh, Jeremy, St. Mary's was lovely, and there was a man with an organ and a monkey, and I gave the monkey a penny and it took it in its hand and took off its cap. Miss Jones has got a cold," she added, "and sneezed all the way home."

"She always has a cold," he said, "or something."

"And it goes straight to her face when she has a cold and makes all her teeth ache —not only one of them, but all. She isn't coming down to supper. She's gone to bed." Still he waited, striving for politeness. "I've got something for you," Mary suddenly said, dropping her voice in the sentimental manner that he hated. Then, as though she were ashamed of what she had done, she took the parcel to the bed and undid the paper with clumsy fingers. "There!" she said. "I got it for you because I thought you'd like it."

He looked at it. It was a book. It was "The Swiss Family Robinson!" It was a companion to his "Robinson Crusoe!" He stared at it; he could say nothing.

"You do like it, don't you?" she asked, gazing at him anxiously. "It's got lots and lots of pictures. There was a funny shop at the end of the street, and I went in with Miss Jones and the man was very nice. And I thought it was just what you'd like. You do like it, don't you?" she asked again.

But he could only stare at it, not coming forward to touch it. He was buried deep, deep in shame.

There came a rattle then on the door and Helen's voice:

"Mary, if you're in there with Jeremy, mother says you're to come at once and have your hair brushed, because it's five minutes to supper."

"Oh dear! I'd forgotten." And with one last glance of anxiety toward Jeremy she went.

Still he did not move. Could anything possibly have happened to prove to him what a pig he was, what a skunk and a cur? Mary had bought it with her own money, five and threepence halfpenny out of ten shillings.

He did not touch the book, but with chin set and eyes resolved he went down to supper.

When the meal was finished he said to Mary:

"Come up-stairs a minute. I want to speak to you."

She followed him tremulously. He seemed to be clothed in his domineering manner. How often, especially of late, she had determined that she would not be afraid of him, but would dig up from within her the common sense, the easy companionship, the laughter that were all there for him, she knew, could she only be at her ease! She even sympathized with him in thinking her so often a fool. She *was* a fool when she was with him, simply because she cared for him so much and thought him so wonderful and so clever.

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He didn't like the book! He was going to thank her for it in the way that he had when he was trying to be polite, and didn't find it easy. She followed him into the bedroom. He carefully closed the door. She saw at once that the book lay exactly where she had placed it on the bed—that he had not even opened it. He regarded her sternly.

"Sit down on that chair," he said. She sat down. "Look here; you oughtn't to have given me that book. You know that Aunt Lucy sent that money for you to spend on yourself."

"I thought you'd like it," she said, pushing at her spectacles, as she always did when she was distressed.

"I do like it," he said. "It's splendid! But I've done something awful—and I've got to tell you now you've given me that."

"Oh, Jeremy, what is it?"

He set his jaw and, without looking at her, made his confession.

"That day I went in with Miss Jones to St. Mary's, I was going to buy you a present. And I did buy you one. I went into that same shop you went to and I bought 'Robinson Crusoe' just like the one you bought me. When I bought it, I meant it for you, of course, but when I got home I liked it so much I kept it for myself and I gave you that old bottle instead—and then I didn't like the rotten book after all and I've never looked at it since your birthday."

Mary's pleasure at being made his confidant in this way was much greater than her horror at his crime. Her bosom heaved with gratified importance.

"I've done things like that, Jeremy," she said. "I got six handkerchiefs for Miss Jones one Christmas, and I kept three of them because I got a terrible bad cold just at the time."

"That's not so bad," he said, shaking his head, "because I gave you an old thing that I'd had for years."

"No," she interrupted. "I've wanted that bottle ever so long. I used to go up to your room and look at it sometimes when you were at school."

He went to the drawer and produced "Robinson Crusoe" and gave it to her. She accepted it gratefully, but said,

"And now I shall have to give you back the bottle."

"Oh, no, you won't!"

"But I can't have two presents."

"Yes, you can. I don't want the old bottle, anyway. I never used it for anything. And now we'll each have a book, so it won't be like a present, exactly."

She smiled with pleasure.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're not angry.'"

"Angry?" he repeated after her.

"Yes," she said, getting up from the bed where she had been sitting. "I thought you were when you asked me to come up here."

He looked at her, puzzled. She seemed to him a new Mary whom he had never seen before.

"Am I often angry?" he asked.

"Not angry, exactly. But I get frightened that you are going to be cross, and then I say the silliest things—not because I want to but because I want to be clever, and then, of course, I never am."

He stood staring at her.

"Am I as beastly as that?" he asked.

"Oh, you're not beastly," she reassured him. "Never—you're not"—forgetting her grammar in her eagerness—"but I'm afraid of you, and I'm fonder of you than anybody—lots fonder—and I always say to myself, 'Now I'm not going to be silly *this* time,' and then I am. I don't know why," she sighed. "But I'm not nearly as silly as I seem," she ended.

NO; SHE wasn't. He suddenly saw that, and he also suddenly saw that he had, all this time, been making a great mistake. Here was a possible companion, not only possible but living, breathing, existing. She was on her own to-night, neither fearful nor silly, meeting him on his own level, superior to him perhaps, knowing more than he did about many things, understanding his feelings——

"I say, Mary; we'll do things together. I'm awfully lonely sometimes. I want some one to tell things to—often. We'll have a great time next holidays."

It was the happiest moment of Mary's life. Too much for her altogether. She just nodded and, clutching "Robinson Crusoe" to her, ran.

Another of these delightful stories by Mr. Walpole will appear in June EVERYBODY'S—out May 15th.

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A Love-Affair That Caused a Political Upheaval

THE LARIAT

Hugh Begins His Campaign in the Most Up-to-Date Manner. But an Unexpected Intrusion Threatens to Wreck His Chances and Does Indeed Lead to a Wreck of Another Nature

By Honoré Willsie

Author of "Still Jim," "Godless Valley," etc.

Illustrations by Remington Schuyler

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story is here up to this issue.

THE terms of his foster-uncle's will seemed hard to Hugh Stewart, but he decided to accept them, since by so doing the Old Sioux Tract would be his, and after two years he would be free to resume exploration of what he believed was one of the greatest fossil-fields in the world. "Uncle Bookie" was an eccentric character whose hobby was the unprofitable Lariat, a book shop in the unliterary community of Fort Sioux, Wyoming, but he did not approve of what seemed to him Hugh's useless hobby, which was paleontology. And so he left him this vast property, which, besides the tract, included a ranch, now run as one of the "dude" variety, on condition that he abandon fossil-hunting and devote himself to the Lariat for two years. The old man's death occurred just after Hugh had discovered a magnificent specimen of triceratops, and this was boxed and stored in a cave waiting an opportunity for removal.

But now a more portentous matter threatened Hugh's postponed projects. His father-in-law, Pink Morgan, who kept the Indian Massacre Hotel in Fort Sioux, was advocating a water-power scheme that would necessitate the flooding of the most scientifically valuable portion of the tract; already the Eastern Electrical Corporation, a Chicago organization, had taken it up; Grafton, the chief engineer, had visited the scene, and the granting of the charter was waiting the pleasure of the Public Utilities Commission at Cheyenne. Hugh resolved to fight this with all his might, but visits to the capital were discouraging, and all he could get from Whitom, the chairman of the commission, was a promise to delay the charter for a few months.

Hugh had married Jessie Morgan, but they had drifted completely apart and he had fallen in love—a love that was returned—with Miriam Page, an energetic business woman from Boston, who came to spend her vacation at the dude ranch. But Jessie had refused to give her husband his freedom. She had always been what Hugh called "lazy-minded," and she now realized that she had wasted her chance of happiness and was determined to regain Hugh.

Miriam wanted him to go into politics and fight for his tract. She kept urging him to do this by letter after she returned home. His mother-in-law, Mrs. Morgan, although heart-broken at the failure of his marriage, also believed in Hugh's ability.

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She was a power in politics and president of the State Federation of Women's Clubs. She thought he ought to go into the legislature and offered him the aid of the women of Wyoming in his fight if he would help in their battle for the passage of the Children's Code Bill.

With the men, Hugh was not popular. He had just received the derisive nickname of "Gray Stallion," because it was believed in the town that he was hiding a gray stallion which his father-in-law coveted, but which rightfully belonged to Red Wolf, a friendly Sioux.

The women began to realize that their success with the Children's Code depended on the election of a governor on some other platform but secretly pledged to forcing the bill through the legislature. So Mrs. Morgan and Mrs. Ellis, chairman of the Children's Code Committee, now united in trying to persuade Hugh to run for that office.

A great misfortune finally settled the matter for Hugh. The boxes containing the triceratops up in the cave were broken open and the superb fossil irretrievably damaged. He suspected his father-in-law, and an accomplice, Johnny Parnell, of this dastardly act. He made up his mind. He would run for governor and, if elected, fight the selfish elements that were enemies alike of the Children's Code and the Old Sioux Tract.

So he told Mrs. Ellis at an interview which took place in the book shop. But the astute woman pointed out one thing: If he was to have any chance of success, he must end the gossip about Miriam Page and return to his wife.

Before Hugh could reply, a fusillade of shots was heard without, and Parnell, gun in hand, burst through the door.

"PINK in here?" demanded Johnny, his great voice filling the shop.

"No. What's the trouble?" Hugh placed himself quickly between the panting cowman and the door.

"Caught him cursing Jessie—about me—about you! I tried to kill the blank, but I had to get my saddle-gun. Leave me out of here, Hughie!"

Hugh did not move.

"What's the idea—to add murder to the rest of Jessie's troubles?"

"What do you care? What is it of your business?" roared Johnny.

He made a sudden rush at Hugh. The two men clinched, swinging heavily against the cash-register. Before Mrs. Ellis could reach the door, it swung open and Jessie ran into the shop.

"Behave yourself, Johnny!" she cried, striding over to the wrestlers.

At the sound of her voice the purple face of the cow-man suddenly paled. He turned himself round in Hugh's grasp and looked at her.

"Where's Pink?" he shouted.

"Looking for his gun, with mother at his heels," Jessie replied.

"He's harmless if Mrs. Morgan is with him," said Mrs. Ellis, with a quick laugh.

Jessie put a hand on Johnny's shoulder.

"Johnny! Johnny! This is not the way to help me, my dear."

Johnny's face twisted.

"Nobody can talk like that to you, Jessie. Maybe you can stand it, but I can't."

"I appreciate that, Johnny, but gun-play won't clear up the snarl I'm in. You'll have to promise me you'll let my father alone, Johnny."

At this moment the population of The Lariat was augmented by the arrival of Pink, six-shooter in hand, with his wife hanging on his arm. Hugh, who was now holding Johnny's saddle-gun, moved with the quickness characteristic of his long, lean body and, catching Pink by the collar, shook him as if he had been a fat pink-and-white bulldog. Then, with indescribable swiftness, he booted him into the street, slammed the door and bolted it.

"After all, he is my father-in-law, I suppose," he said, with a casual air.

"You could have taken his gun without kicking him." Mrs. Morgan's voice was tart.

"I'll kick him again if he doesn't let Jess alone," returned Hugh, breaking Johnny's gun and dropping the cartridges into his own pocket.

"After all, she is your wife, I suppose," said Johnny dryly.

There was a moment's uncomfortable silence during which Hugh and Johnny stared at each other.

"I hate you, you bone-digging she man, you!" Johnny broke the silence with bitter tones that filled the room.

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Mrs. Ellis drew a quick breath. On Hugh's face appeared the look of fury that she had seen there before. He walked slowly over to Johnny.

"Parnell," he said, "take that back!"

"It's true," repeated Johnny.

"Take it back!" said Hugh again, his gray eyes boring into the cow-man's.

The river-murmur filled the room. Jessie's fine gaze, endlessly weary, did not leave Hugh's profile.

"I'll take back what I called you, but I hate you just the same." Johnny's voice was husky.

"All right!" Hugh nodded. "Now, you three go sit down by the stove. I want to talk to you."

JOHNNY did not move from his place by the cash-register, but the two women took the chairs Hugh indicated. He slowly walked the length of the room, from the stove to the rear window, where he stared at the far wall of the cañon unseeingly; from the rear window to the front window, where his unseeing gaze rested for a long moment on the distant black silhouette of a coyote above the east crest of the cañon wall. Then he turned deliberately to his old place before the counter.

"I am going," he said carefully, "to be governor of Wyoming. I have no particular fitness for the job that I know of, but I can learn. You, Mrs. Morgan, and you, Mrs. Ellis, are going to use your resources to help me swing the woman vote. I'm going in without a solitary promise except to force through the Children's Code."

"You can be nominated, but you can't be elected unless you return to your wife!" exclaimed Mrs. Ellis, a trace of anger in her voice.

Hugh turned on her.

"Mrs. Ellis, you and Fort Sioux in general have nothing whatever to do with my private life. I am a decent, law-abiding citizen. What lies or does not lie between me and Jessie Morgan is not your business or that of Wyoming. As governor, I'm not going to administer a marital code for the state."

"Hugh is right in that!" exclaimed Jessie. suddenly.

"He'll find out whether he's right or not when the members of women's clubs begin manhandling him!" ejaculated Mrs. Ellis.

"Pshaw!" snapped Mrs. Morgan. "They'll think all the more of him. I know women."

"Women and the woman vote are two different matters," affirmed Mrs. Ellis.

Johnny Parnell gave a strident laugh.

"Looks like the Gray Stallion would have trouble with his herd from the very start!"

The three women turned startled faces toward Hugh. But the look of fury did not return to his face. He nodded gravely.

"I accept the appellation. But it's going to be a mixed herd. For instance, you're going to bring in the cattlemen in this part of the state."

"I am like thunder!" shouted Johnny.

"Don't waste my time, Johnny. I'm through fooling. I'm swapping you one invaluable dinosaur, smashed and scattered to the four winds, for one solid but not invaluable ranchers' vote."

"What are you talking about, you fool?" roared Johnny.

"You know what I'm talking about. Are you going to deliver the goods?"

Johnny glared at Hugh, anger, surprise and a certain unwonted respect for his rival struggling for supremacy in his good-natured face. Mrs. Ellis, leaning forward in her chair, turned a glance of bewilderment on Mrs. Morgan, which Mrs. Morgan, bright eyes on Hugh's profile, did not see.

"Hustle up, Johnny!" insisted Hugh.

"You've gone plumb loco, Hughie," growled the cow-man.

"Have I? You've seen fit to intrude yourself on me in some particularly personal matters, Johnny. Now you'll pay. Are you going to deliver that vote?"

Johnny did not return Hugh's threatening stare. He was watching Jessie, as if to discover what thoughts were passing behind the shield of her strong, tired face. But he received no help from her.

"I've been so patient with you, Johnny"—Hugh's low voice was not pleasant—"that you felt privileged to call me 'effeminate.' I'm going to see you eat those words before many months. One wantonly destroyed dinosaur, Johnny, for the cow-men's vote.

"All right," said the cow-man suddenly, and he walked to the door.

Before he had unbolted it, Hugh's quiet voice brought him to pause.

"Drop in here to-night, Johnny, for a conference."

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Johnny grunted acquiescence and went out. Hugh turned to his mother-in-law.

"You're to take orders from Mrs. Ellis, Mrs. Morgan. She is my campaign manager."

Mrs. Morgan jumped to her feet.

"Nothing of the sort—" she began.

"That's enough, Mrs. Morgan!" interrupted Hugh. "You can run Pink, but you are now coming through and make up to me for what you've done to my life."

"I won't take orders from a woman!" snapped his mother-in-law.

"You'll take orders from my campaign manager," returned Hugh, "or I'll wreck every ambition you possess."

"I'll take orders if you make Jessie Mrs. Ellis's assistant, and let the orders to me come through her," offered Mrs. Morgan.

"Jessie is to keep out of this." Hugh's voice was short.

"She's going to help me."

"No, by Jupiter!" suddenly thundered Hugh. "Jessie is to keep out of this."

Jessie rose and, with the long deliberation of her stride never more accented, left The Lariat. Her mother would have followed her, but Hugh touched her shoulder.

"I want your agreement, Mrs. Morgan."

"I'll agree—if I seem to the public to have as much authority as Mrs. Ellis." And this time she reached the door without further interruption.

Hugh turned to Mrs. Ellis. She met his look squarely.

"I'm not overpowered by all this masterfulness, Mr. Stewart," she said.

"I'll not try masterfulness on you," he returned gently. He put his hands on her shoulders and looked down into her face with his charming expression of affectionate friendliness.

"Mr. Stewart"—Mrs. Ellis's voice was as gentle as the man's—"your wife——"

"Don't! Don't!" Bitterness replaced the affection in his gaze. "You must not, you shall not jeopardize our friendship by touching again on that."

"I shall presume on friendship to say this much," insisted Mrs. Ellis: "You have loved Jessie very much or you would not be so bitter. You still feel strongly about her or you would have become indifferent to what she may or may not do."

There was silence, during which the two looked deep into each other's eyes. Then Hugh said softly,

"Mrs. Ellis, are you going to be my campaign manager?"

"If you will——"

"No! No!" interrupted Hugh. "You are never to bring that up again." He sat down beside her and clasped both her hands. "Mrs. Ellis, help me in this crisis."

"Young man, are you making love to a woman old enough to be your mother—who wishes she were your mother?" Hugh smiled and waited. Mrs. Ellis freed one of her hands and smothed the hair back from Hugh's forehead. "My dear," she said, "if you are not very careful, you are going to wreck your career."

"I know," replied Hugh. "What a pity things mean so much to us! But, Mrs. Ellis, I am going to be a governor—and a good governor for a few years before I go back to my dinosaurs."

"Once you are made governor, you'll never go back to your geology. You'll have no right to."

"Then you are going to help me—without exacting any terms?" exclaimed Hugh.

"I'm a weak female fool," sighed Mrs. Ellis. "Not so weak, either. I have great faith in your riding over impossible trails."

Hugh lifted one of her plump hands to his lips and rose to his feet. There were tears in his eyes. Something in Mrs. Ellis's voice had brought to his memory his tall, gray-eyed mother star-gazing with him on Christmas eve.

"I want—very much," he said huskily, "to make up—to Bookie—for a good many things."

For a moment Mrs. Ellis did not reply. Then she said quietly:

"It's going to be a tremendous fight. I shall enjoy it. I shall begin to enjoy it by calling you by your given name. Hughie, did Johnny Parnell destroy your dinosaur?"

"Evidently he knows something about it," replied Hugh, with an amused grin.

"You mean that you were bluffing?"

Hugh nodded as he filled his pipe. Mrs. Ellis suddenly laughed.

"It is really going to be a great fight. Now let's begin to lay plans."

IT WAS a great fight. Wyoming never had been sundered before by so strange or so bitter a political war. Hugh himself was not bitter. He drove himself relentlessly. He neither gave nor asked quarter.

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But he was too impersonal to be acrimonious. This was not true either of his followers or of his adversaries. The latter resented Hugh's presence in politics. He was classified as a "school-man." To a Westerner, a school-man has very little to do with life. They resented even more deeply his fight against the Thumb Butte dam-site. But most of all they resented his cool disdain of party machinery and party politics. They could not, of course, be made to realize that this disdain was based on ignorance and on the fact that Hugh was moved by regrets and desires incomprehensible to any one who could see life only from the personal angle.

On the other hand, Hugh's followers were loyal to an astounding degree. They liked him. His popularity was of a sudden and violent growth, and not with the women alone.

Under a more or less thin shell of hardihood your Western plainsman is extremely sentimental. He is starved for romance. He hungers for the appeal to his imagination. And the story of Hugh's self-exiling to The Lariat was romance pure and simple. As much as they understood of his sacrifice, the plainsmen approved highly. But still more highly they approved of the quality of his defiance. After all, this still was a frontier state. Men still delighted in the single-gun hold-up. And Hugh, standing alone against the great Eastern Electric Corporation and against the ring at Cheyenne—Hugh inexperienced, lonely, independent of spirit, iron of will—held his followers in a fever of enthusiasm.

IT WAS a tumultuous spring and summer. Under the extraordinary itinerary arranged by Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Morgan, there was not a remote section of the huge and difficult state to which Hugh did not penetrate. He traveled for the most part in the airplane, christened the "*Dinosaur*" and driven by Martin, the ex-ace. There was nothing obviously noteworthy in Hugh's speeches. No one thought of Hugh as an orator or even as a speaker. Reported in the Cheyenne papers, his speeches were reflections of the talks he had given to the two committees of women in The Lariat many months before. But no one who heard Hugh speak ever was to forget either the man or his vision.

Vision! That is the gift of the gods which makes one man lead while others may only follow. The capacity to see life in the large, to place events in their true relation to their cause, to behold the beginning and the end of the gigantic procession, even while oneself a minute figure moving in the midst of it—this was Hugh's great and unconscious gift. His personal charm was exceedingly important; that melancholy but eager friendliness on his tired face, that peculiarly noble appeal in the shape and set of his head, the calm, the sureness. This was invaluable. But alone it could not have won Hugh the nomination, nor could the beauty and splendor of his imagination as it had been before Bookie's death had tinged it with regret, before his love for Miriam had fired it with passion and ardor, have given his audiences into his hands. It needed the combination of all that had fed his mind and tortured his heart to bring him to his place of leadership.

In spite of, or, perhaps, because of his detached attitude toward state and party lines, Hugh made some exceedingly astute decisions as to the choice of people who were to handle the details of his campaign. That doughty old warrior, Mrs. Ellis, known as the mother of the Children's Code, had the respect of every voter in the state. She was a clean-handed politician, ruthless, tactful. And though she had temporarily lost the code, and although Hugh did not mention it in his campaign speeches, there was a primal righteousness in a woman politician fighting for babies born and unborn that caused her enemies to respect and fear her strength. For every one in the state knew that Hugh must have pledged himself to the Children's Code in order to win Mrs. Ellis.

The other astute decision was with regard to Johnny Parnell. For this reason the conference with Johnny that first evening after Hugh had declared himself was noteworthy. Johnny came in after supper, truculently enough, to find Hugh sitting alone, smoking, feet on the window-ledge. Hugh indicated an empty chair beside him.

"Let's have it out, Johnny," he said. "Not just now about the cave and the dinosaur. I don't want to see red for the next few months. I mean about this new enmity of yours."

"You can't get decent help out of a guy

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you're blackmailing," growled the cow-man, throwing a half-smoked cigarette out of the window and lighting another immediately.

"I know that," returned Hugh. "I'm not going to blackmail you. What I said to you this morning was just the wildest sort of guess on my part. If you hadn't come back as you did, you could have bluffed me easily enough."

Johnny jumped to his feet.

"You mean to tell me you didn't have the goods on me and Pink?"

"Pink, too, eh?" grunted Hugh, his face growing a little white.

Johnny burst into loud laughter.

"Hughie, dog-gone your fossil hide! Why, you dogy, sad-eyed maverick, you! You've got Sherlock Holmes beaten at his own game. And me! Me! The strong-armed Swede! Priding myself on being a real he man caught without trying by the guy I called a sissy. Hughie, I'd ought to take you out and get you drunk!" And again Johnny shouted with laughter.

Hugh grinned and waited until the cow-man had wiped his eyes and had seated himself again. Then he said quietly:

"I'm not going to let the dinosaur matter rest here, but, as I've just said, we'll put it by till the campaign is over. I'm not going to blackmail you. I'm going to buy you."

"There's just one way," returned Johnny, "that you can buy me, and that is by giving Jessie a square deal."

"Jessie is getting a square deal," said Hugh. "She is a strong, intelligent woman who up to now has refused to do her bit. Life has struck her a blow that's wakened her. She's seeing and feeling and thinking things now that she never knew existed. She's intrinsically more virile and much cleverer than you are. She doesn't care about you. She doesn't want your help. Why don't you drop out of her and my personal affairs?"

Johnny smoked violently but in silence. After a moment Hugh went on:

"I have a straight business proposition to make you. You are one of the most prominent men in the Cattle-raisers' Association of Wyoming. You dislike the dude-end of ranching as much as I do, and the big end of the business on Bookie's ranch always has been cattle. Let's cut out dudes up there from now on. Let's make the ranch the headquarters, experiment-station, object-lesson, anything you want to call it, for men who are trying to keep Wyoming a cattle-raising state."

Johnny's eyes gleamed. He sat up very straight and threw another half-smoked cigarette out the window.

"I don't know exactly how you'll go about it," Hugh went on thoughtfully. "That's your business."

"Lord! I know how!" shouted Johnny. "Why, say, Hughie; we could save Wyoming from the sheep-men and the visitor if I could have a chance to carry out some ideas I've got."

"Well," said Hugh, "you go ahead. You're equal partners with me from now on—eh?"

"Hughie," exclaimed Johnny, his great voice infinitely persuasive, "are you doing this just to get the cattle-raisers back of you?"

Hugh rose and paced the length of the room, and back.

"Johnny, you've said and done some hard things to me lately," he said then.

"By God, I have!"—bringing his fist down on the window-sill. "I deserve what you gave Pink."

"I'd hate to try to give it to you." Hugh glanced appraisingly at Johnny's brawny bulk. "I like you, Johnny—always did. Your father and Uncle Bookie were buddies in the old days. You and I've ridden the range many a week together—" He paused,. then said abruptly, "The cattle-raisers must be made quietly to understand that I'm going to put through the Children's Code."

Johnny nodded and rose, his white teeth flashing in his old wide smile.

"All right, Hughie! You can keep on riding herd in a book store. Me—I've got to start a round-up to vaccinate cattle-raisers. By the way—what are we going to do with Pink?"

"Let him go his gait," replied Hugh. "He's done his worst."

"I guess you're right," agreed Johnny, and he took a short cut through the rear window to the hotel corral.

Thus Johnny Parnell was won to the cause of the Gray Stallion and developed into a real and powerful party leader.

HUGH'S first and greatest apprehension was, of course, that the Eastern Electric Corporation would be able to begin actual

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The cheers were given. Hugh raised his hand for silence, but before he could go on a voice shrilled, "Would a thoroughbred have Miriam Page there in The Lariat?"

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work on the dam before the fall election. Before he was able, however, to form a new plan of attack on the Public Utilities Commission, he was astonished to receive a visit in The Lariat from Charlie Whitom.

THE old cow-man, smooth-shaven face, red-veined and full-jowled above a bright-red necktie, came in to ask for a book on cattle-raising. Hugh looked his shelves over seriously enough before he announced regretfully that he had no such work.

"But," he added cheerfully, "you might find one up at the ranch."

"Yes; I suppose so," replied Whitom, looking from Hugh to the shelves, with their heterogeneous mixture of books, Indian curios and fossils. "I heard you'd quit dudes for good."

Hugh nodded.

"Parnell and I decided there were bigger things to be done with Uncle Bookie's old ranch than fattening dudes."

"I suppose so!" Old Whitom snorted. "Like the A-B-C's. of dehorning! Well, Stewart, what are you after, anyhow?"

"I want to be governor of Wyoming," replied Hugh, giving him a square look.

"You'll never make it."

"If you're so sure of that, why bother to buy your book on cattle-raising from me?"

"Lord! What do you amount to, anyhow?" Whitom snorted again. "Why, the first time I ever saw you, you were a freckle-faced little brat, crying because some one had stepped on some fool fossil you'd lugged into the ranch."

"History repeats itself," retorted Hugh grimly.

"And now you're going to the women with it," Whitom went on, "and they're swarming like hornets up there on the commission. Call 'em off. We aren't afraid of 'em."

"Me?" asked Hugh innocently. "But I am afraid of 'em. The leading hornet, as it were, is my campaign manager. I wouldn't think of directing her movements."

"Yes—and her right hand is your mother-in-law. She's not only armed like a hornet but like a bee, too. Come now, Stewart; what do you want to call 'em off?"

"And I tell you I can't call 'em off."

"Your job being merely to make speeches, I suppose."

"About that."

Whitom refreshed himself with a mouthful of cut plug. When he spoke again, his voice was slightly thick but had lost its sneer.

"You've got a powerful backing, Stewart. Even Eli realizes that he's got his work cut out for him if the women's man gets the nomination. You aren't going to like politics, my boy. Better stay with your fossils."

"I'd like to, but, you see, the decisions of the governor and of the Public Utilities commissioners threaten to take my fossils away from me. Whitom, I'm going to fix it so that the natural resources of this state are going to be saved to the future."

"Babies coming under the head of natural resources, I suppose," commented Whitom.

"Absolutely!" returned Hugh shortly.

"I don't like the look of it," said the old politician suddenly. "The way these schoolmen and such are horning themselves into politics is awful bad for the country. Why, we might as well turn the government over to the women and the professors and be done with it."

"Whitom," said Hugh soberly, "Mrs. Ellis has Eli beaten on every point. She's more honest, more intelligent, better educated, and a better politician. Wyoming should be grateful for her."

"She's a woman, ain't she? So, no matter how hard she is, she's soft. The same way with professors. I don't want 'em in office and"—raising his voice—"I'll fight 'em as long as I live."

"Of course you will," agreed Hugh calmly. "Well, Whitom, I'm sorry I can't dig up a book on cattle-raising for you. Here is a book I put in, at Mrs. Ellis's suggestion, on the care and feeding of infants. How would you like that?"

"You go to blazes!" growled Whitom. "Stewart, you come up to Cheyenne and have a talk with me and Eli. That's what I really stopped over for."

"According to my schedule, I'll reach Cheyenne in June. I'll be glad to see you both."

Whitom eyed Hugh for a long minute.

"Is that the best you can do?"

"Yes, it is," replied Hugh cheerfully.

"You are making an awful mistake, Stewart," said the older man. "There's the east-bound whistling now. You'll be sorry

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for this, Stewart." And he was gone, leaving Hugh with an enormously increased respect for the weight of the women voters of his native state.

He had reason to add to this respect when, a little later, the Public Utilities Commission postponed decision on the Thumb Butte charter until fall.

FROM Easter on to the fall elections, Hugh gave all his time to the fight. He turned The Lariat over to Principal Jones' care. Afraid of Fred Allward's capacity for getting into trouble, he sent the old miner out on a long prospecting-trip that should cover the northern extreme of that section of the Old Sioux Tract which the building of the dam would cause the river to inundate. Fred departed under strict orders to confine himself only to prospecting and to curb his ambition to exhume the fossils himself. Jessie went back to the ranch, in what capacity Hugh neither knew nor asked.

It was early summer when Miriam appeared in Fort Sioux. She had not written Hugh of her proposed visit, and she chose a dramatic moment for her arrival.

There was no telephone in The Lariat. Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Morgan, with half a dozen of the faithful, had been sitting for hours at the telephone in the Indian Massacre. Now, radiant with the bigness of their news, they were moving in a solid phalanx on Hugh in The Lariat. It was not yet dusk, though the sun had set. Hugh, standing at the rear window, his back to the river, saw the group of women's faces as in a glory, flushed and uplifted by the tender warmth of the afterglow. He stepped forward to meet them.

Mrs. Ellis left the group and, holding out her hand, said,

"You are the Fusion nominee for governor, Hughie."

It was at this moment that Miriam came in at the open door. At first, no one saw her. Hugh, in laughing reply to the women's congratulation, saw Mrs. Morgan's sudden scowl and looked up to see the woman he loved standing at the edge of the group. He turned very white.

"Ah, Miriam!" he said in a voice that no woman there was to forget, and clasped the slender gloved hand held out to him. "Mrs. Ellis," he said, "this is Miss Page."

Mrs. Ellis bowed and stood in silence while Hugh made the other introductions. No one offered to shake hands with Miriam. No one spoke when introduced. It was Mrs. Morgan who made the first attack.

"You are here for the summer, Miss Page?"

"No, Mrs. Morgan. I am on a business trip to Seattle, and I've stopped over for a few days to congratulate Hugh on his success as a politician."

"I'm no politician!" exclaimed Hugh. "Here are the politicians." He included the group in a gesture.

"Are there no men?" asked Miriam.

As if in answer to her query, Principal Jones strolled in. He shook hands with Hugh, then with Miriam.

"Come out to help, Miss Page?" he asked.

"If I can—in the few days of my stay."

Principal Jones nodded and turned to Hugh.

"The men over at the barber shop are about torn in two. They hate you for your attitude on Thumb Butte. But they'd like to have it appear as if they had some influence in getting a Fort Sioux man nominated for governor of the state. So far, hate has won."

"Has it really gone that far, Hughie?" asked Miriam. "You wrote me that the town had deserted you, but I didn't realize all that that meant."

"Oh, I'm reconciled to being deserted," replied Hugh. "The best citizens of the town have stuck by me"—nodding at the group of women.

"I can see that," agreed Miriam readily. "But the men ought to back you, too."

"The finest men in Wyoming—the ranchers—are backing him," said Mrs. Ellis suddenly. "Fort Sioux doesn't happen to be a ranchers' town."

"I see." Miriam's tone carried relief.

"No; you don't see!" exclaimed Mrs. Morgan, speaking with an exasperation she found impossible to control. "You don't see that your presence in Wyoming at this time is enough to lose Hughie the election."

Hugh flushed and lifted his head angrily, but before he could speak there was a sudden blare of horns without and Johnny Parnell burst into the room.

"Hail, Governor! Come out and meet the cattlemen! Been gathering all day. Come out, old Gray Stallion!"

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He threw his arm excitedly round Hugh's shoulders and rushed him out to the door-step. Flames were rising from a bonfire in the street. By its light, Hugh beheld men's faces turned up to his—many, many faces. They filled the street. For a moment the blare of horns was all. Then a great voice shouted:

"Three cheers for the Gray Stallion! Hip! Hip! Hooray!"

The uproar reverberated from the cañon wall in an echo of ear-splitting intensity.

"Hey, Governor; tell us the truth!" cried some one when the echo had subsided. "Who gets the gray stallion when the fight is over?"

"We'll turn him into a fossil and stand him in Pink Morgan's corral as a consolation prize!" shouted a voice.

There was huge laughter and more cheers. Then a demand for a speech.

Hugh, standing erect in the doorway, his face a little thinner, a little more weary than usual, features blocked out in heavy shadow and crimson light, hesitated in the silence that followed the demand. He was more deeply moved by this ovation than any he had received during the months of speechmaking. On the outskirts of the crowd of men who wore proudly on the lapels of their coats a little button bearing a gray horse-head, he distinguished the faces of his fellow townsmen—disapproving faces, it seemed to Hugh, even in the warming glow of the fire. And a pang of regret darkened the happiness of the moment. Then he gathered himself together.

"I can't talk about anything but fossils, you know," he said clearly. "I'm nothing but what our political enemies call me, a bone-digger. I——"

A man's voice interrupted.

"Gosh! And I been backing you for a stallion! A thorbughbred gray at that!"

"Three cheers for the thoroughbred!" roared another voice.

The cheers were given. Hugh raised his hand for silence, but before he could go on with his speech a cow-man's voice on the outskirts of the crowd shrilled,

"Would a thoroughbred have Miriam Page there in The Lariat?"

A storm of hisses from the wearers of the buttons greeted this query. Hugh's face went white and furious, but his anger did not reveal itself in his voice as he said,

"No thoroughbred would ask or answer such a question."

A ripple of hand-clapping followed this, and Hugh went on:

"It doesn't matter what I am. What does matter is what I can see and get you to see. All that I want to do is to make you view Wyoming as my Uncle Bookie did, here from this door-step. He saw Wyoming men and women as a breed different from other states, because our plains and mountains make them so. He knew that folks born of such country as this had a chance to be bigger in mind and body than folks of lesser states. He knew that they had not only the chance but the obligation to be bigger. And he saw them failing to be so. It hurt the old man. And it hurt him worst of all that I was the greatest failure in these things that he knew.

"Because I'm selfish I didn't wake up to Uncle Bookie's way of seeing things until Wyoming threatened to hurt what I loved. And I couldn't make anybody care until it occurred to me that they were just like me—and that I was indifferent to things they loved, and that I, too, was hurting Wyoming. I can never be the man Uncle Bookie was, but I can at least fight to save Wyoming to the future."

He paused and went on slowly:

"I wish you all could have seen Wyoming as I have been seeing it these many months, from beneath the wings of the *Dinosaur*—the plains spead out in purple glory, infinite in extent, yet melting always into mountain ranges that the *Dinosaur* must wing to the very stars to crest. Wyoming! It belongs to the eagles, and we have been seeking to give it to the coyote pack."

Hugh bowed, then went down into the moved and applauding crowd.

IT WAS nearly ten o'clock when he returned to The Lariat. Miriam was sitting alone, her chin in her palm. She rose and came rapidly to Hugh's side.

"Hughie, I never thought what my coming might do to you. You've told me nothing. Has there been scandal and talk, and has it hurt your cause?"

Hugh hesitated. Miriam did not wait for him to reply, but went on a little breathlessly:

"Don't try to answer. Of course it's

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been awful for you. Hughie, is that why you look so terribly worn?"

"I don't think so, Miriam. You see, politics is hard on those who like it. And I don't like it. I've been sweating blood to make myself carry on. So it's doubly hard on me. But it's worth it."

Tears welled to her eyes.

"I don't care what it does to other people. But not to you. Oh, Hughie, Hughie, what have I done to you?"

"You've given me many perfect hours and some exquisite dreams," answered Hugh steadily.

Women's voices sounded without the open door, and Mrs. Ellis came in, followed by Jessie.

"Hughie," said Mrs. Ellis, "I've persuaded Jessie to come in—to save the situation in the eyes of the public."

Crimson-faced, Miriam turned to the gray-haired veteran of politics.

"Mrs. Ellis, I shall go at——"

"I don't care to talk to you, madam. You have jeopardized the future of Wyoming." Turning to Jessie, "Do you want me to stay, Jessie?"

Jessie, tall, calm, strong and tanned, smiled slightly.

"We shall do very well without you, Mrs. Ellis. You'd better go to bed. Telephone to the ranch—will you?—as to my whereabouts."

Mrs. Ellis nodded and went out. Jessie turned to Miriam.

"I'm sorry to intrude, Miss Page. But I guess this is best—that is, if you and Hughie sincerely want the Gray Stallion to win."

Hugh looked from one woman to another, uneasy and bewildered. For once, Miriam's finesse failed her. She spoke abruptly.

"What is the first train I can get west?"

"There is nothing out of here to-night. The limited goes through the junction at two in the morning, but that won't help you any. The junction is a hundred miles west of here," replied Jessie.

"How about the air-plane?" asked Miriam.

"Martin has gone up to Cheyenne," replied Hugh. "Don't be in too much of a hurry, Miriam."

"There's every reason in the world to hurry," returned Miriam, looking at Jessie, who nodded.

"I have a suggestion to make, Hughie: You're a fairly good air-man now, they say. Let's make a spectacle. You drive Miss Page and me to the junction. Nobody has gone to bed in Fort Sioux except perhaps Mrs. Ellis. It ought to shut people's mouths for this once."

Without a word, Hugh jerked on his leather coat and cap.

"I'll be ready in half an hour," he said, and strode out.

"You've let him in for a sweet situation!" Jessie's voice was contemptuous.

"Well—and I'm suffering for it, am I not?" said Miriam sharply.

"Not enough or as much as he will later," replied Jessie. "Come over to the hotel and I'll give you some warm clothes."

"Thank you," said Miriam stiffly. "I have extra things in my suitcase here."

There was, as Jessie had surmised there would be, a large and interested audience on the great open space by the bridge where Hugh now parked the *Dinosaur*.

"What! You, too, Jessie?" called Billy Chamberlain.

"Me? Didn't you know Hughie was going to teach me to drive this pet stone bird of his, Billy? We're going to take Miss Page to make the limited at the junction, and then I'm to have my first lesson."

THERE was no moon, but the stars were brilliant. Hugh, teeth set over the seething caldron within him, lifted the *Dinosaur* in the familiar proud spiral until the river and the black cañon rim were only vague traceries below; then he turned westward.

This, above all, he had not wanted—that Miriam should in any way be made to feel humiliated. She was of such fine stuff, so straight, so eager, so proud! He could not bear to feel that any sense of shame had touched her. Yet how utterly stupid, how entirely helpless he had been! The thing had been done, and Jessie, in saving the situation, had added the very peak of pain to Miriam's humiliation. He recognized Jessie's generosity fully, and was only the angrier for its ease and fineness.

He lifted the *Dinosaur* above the mesas, above the fast-flying ramparts of the White Wolves, among whose peaks, as always, clouds were drifting. The clouds were thick and high to-night. Hugh and Martin had not made many night trips—never across the White Wolves except in the

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brilliant light of day. He sent the *Dinosaur* up and up until the cold was piercing and he dared expose the two women no further. Still the clouds persisted. He drove with a vague sense of bewilderment now. No stars above. No earth below. Only the thick white vapor, stultifying, saturating.

Jessie touched his arm and shouted in his ear,

"Miriam is fainting with the cold and elevation!"

Elevation! Cold did not matter so much, but the elevation was getting her! He began, as cautiously as might be, to nose downward. He believed that he must by now be well past the crest of the Wolves and that it was safe to venture beneath the vast continent of clouds. The *Dinosaur* dropped out of the clouds as suddenly as it had entered them. It was very dark. Suddenly something huge, blacker than the night itself, loomed before them. Hugh reversed his engine. The plane crashed into the upward slope of the peak, ran with decreasing speed up and up, crashed into a wall and, half turning, slid downward. The engine stopped.

THEY brought up in utter blackness. The accident had come with unbelievable swiftness. At one moment they had been thundering through white space. The next they had dropped into black silence. Hugh had been thrown violently against the side of the cockpit at the moment of the crash into the wall, but, except for this, the descent and stop had been gentle enough.

"Either of you hurt?" cried Hugh.

"I guess not," replied Jessie dubiously.

"I'm all right," said Miriam. "At least I can breathe here."

"Neither of you stir while I look about." Hugh prepared with infinite caution to investigate their whereabouts.

His right arm was useless, but he managed his pocket-flash with his left hand. The plane was caught on a ledge above a cañon, on whose depths the flash-light made no impression; and, for all its charmed nine lives, it was lying so precariously balanced that Hugh shuddered with fear for the two women. He dared not keep them in ignorance of their danger, and implored them to crawl out with breathless care.

It seemed a thousand years to him before they were lying, panting, on the ledge beside him.

For a few moments no one spoke; then Hugh said:

"The clouds seem to be breaking, and we'll have a chance to locate ourselves. This ledge is very narrow. Don't move about without using the flash."

"What is holding the *Dinosaur* up?" asked Jessie.

"Some freak of balance and the devilish luck that pursues her," replied Hugh. "I could write a book on what she's done to Martin's and my nerves this summer."

"What shall we do?" queried Miriam.

"As soon as there is more light, I'll try to get away for help," answered Hugh.

"Can't we relaunch the *Dinosaur?*" asked Miriam.

"Not from this ledge. It will have to be lowered." Hugh winced with pain as he spoke. He thought his arm must be broken. "I don't want to smash the old bird up. She's trump-card for the Gray Stallion, and I'm fond of her for herself—hang her!"

"Have you any idea of where we are, Hughie?" Miriam's voice sounded forlorn, and he reached out to touch her knee comfortingly.

"I have an idea we're sitting on the shoulder of Big Fang, the highest peak of the White Wolves. If that's true, we're twenty bad miles from help at Heckles' ranch. But there's no danger at all. There's a couple of days' grub in the *Dinosaur*. I'll leave you girls here and make Heckles' in twenty-four hours."

"We'd better all go together," said Jessie.

"Don't be foolish!" exclaimed Hugh. "Miriam couldn't make that trip."

"If you think I'll stay on this ledge alone for two days with Miriam Page, you—well, you misjudge how I feel about things. I'd rather go on myself and leave you two here; only, that would undo what I've tried to accomplish." Jessie's voice, disembodied in the darkness, sounded curiously bitter. Her hearers knew that she was not smiling.

"It's an impossible situation!" ejaculated Miriam.

"Exactly," replied Jessie.

Hugh rose. His arm was hurting him intolerably. But he felt that it was impossible for him to sit quietly with these two women.

"Where are you going, Hughie?" demanded Jessie.

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Hugh shuddered with fear for the two women. He dared not keep them in ignorance of their danger, and implored them to crawl out with breathless care.

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"I'm going to start."

"Don't be a fool! That's suicide in this darkness. If you go, I go." Jessie rose.

"I think that's the answer," said Miriam quietly. "Both of you go, leaving me here. No harm can come to me."

"I'd not think of it!" Hugh sat down abruptly. "There is no immediate hurry. We'll wait until daylight."

IN THE darkness he could vaguely discern that Jessie had seated herself at the edge of the ledge, close to the *Dinosaur*. Miriam was leaning against the wall of the mountain, some distance from either of them. Silence fell. Hugh managed to get his pipe going, and, clasping the elbow of his injured arm firmly in his left hand, he gave himself over to contemplation that was hardly less painful than his injury.

He would not permit himself to feel that he had done wrong to any one in allowing his love for Miriam to be frankly expressed. But he was coming to a full realization of the truth of Mrs. Ellis's statement that a man in public life in America must live his private life conventionally or else be willing to face situations such as he had faced this evening in The Lariat. For himself, he did not care. He sincerely believed that the bigness of the love he and Miriam felt for each other was full justification for itself. But he had discovered this evening that what hurt Miriam hurt him, what hurt Mrs. Ellis hurt him, and, most of all, whatever threatened the success of the Gray Stallion's mission was almost intolerable to him. And yet he could not contemplate giving up Miriam without envisaging a mental and spiritual anguish which he believed he could not endure.

Hugh possessed to an exaggerated degree the priceless attribute of the scientific mind. He was willing to face truth within himself. He never sought to deceive that inner man which most men dare not face. And life holds no more final satisfaction than this—that within one's deeps truth about oneself has been found and faced. However devastating to one's happiness that truth may be, still, that exquisite satisfaction of the soul is ultimate compensation.

So Hugh sat in the darkness, once more sounding his own depths and finding there the awful truth that personal selfishness is always social selfishness, and that social selfishness is the hall-mark of the brute creation—those brutes whose extinction marked the silent mile-stones of trackless time.

Trackless time! Hugh's pipe went cold. He forgot the pain in his arm. He was beginning the second of the two years which he had promised to Bookie. Two years of his tiny, tiny span of life! God! What an infinitesimal moment! What an eternity!

The wind was rising by degrees. Dawn must be coming. Hugh thought that Miriam and Jessie must be asleep, they sat so silent upon the ledge. He hoped that they were.

Poor souls, how incomparably he had messed their lives!

A bluebird piped from below the ledge. After a long time another bluebird answered, faintly and remotely. The damp coldness of the night had been odorless. Now the wind brought the indescribable pungent odor of the dawn. Faintly, opposite, lifted a vague black outline as of an opposing mounting or cañon wall. Pale stars appeared above the outline. The stars hardly had appeared when they were effaced by an increased translucency of the sky that merged into the translucency of the stars and so absorbed them.

Imperceptibly now Hugh was able to discern the huddled form of Miriam. His eyes followed along the growing edge of the shelf on which their lives were so precariously perched. The wings of the *Dinosaur*—something huddled beneath. Jessie? No; a boulder against which the *Dinosaur* braced itself from the chasm below. Hugh turned on his flash-light and threw a finger of light the length of the ledge.

Jessie was not there!

He started to his feet with an exclamation of fear. Miriam wakened with a groan.

"Hughie! What is it?"

"Jess has gone! She can't have fallen or I'd have heard her. She's done what she threatened."

The two stared at each other while dawn in full panoply marched over the shoulder of Big Fang.

With his wife gone and alone with Miriam on the mountain, how will Hugh explain this unfortunate mishap to his constituents? See the next instalment of "The Lariat," in June EVERYBODY'S—out May 15th.

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The Good Little God

Chan Hop Starts Out with Great Faith in Deities Who Specialize in Driving the Chariot of Destiny, Has Some Very Interesting Adventures, and Then ——

By L. B. Yates

CHAN HOP rolled over on his hip and woke with a start as his slippered feet struck the floor. It was as though a cat had jumped from the pantry shelf. Then he sat upright on the low bunk upon which he had been lying, and gradually brought himself back to things earthly and material.

To tell the truth, Chan had been dreaming, and as he slumbered a marvelous movie—produced in the mysterious studio of the Unknowable—had flickered and spun its woof and web of episode and human interest, of daring deed and rich reward before his very eyes.

It was a continuity replete with adventure and unusual happening. In the swift slang of the street it would have been dubbed a "five-reeler." Its hero—a death-defying, masterful character—always appeared clad in a silken peacock-hued blouse and with the scarlet button of distinction decorating his cap. More than once he had trod the very red edges of hell, but a multicolored rainbow had cast upon the closing scenes the kindly graces of a benediction, and at that rainbow's end was a jeweled chalice filled to its broad brim with gold.

Still held firmly in the grip of this amazing portrayal, Chan Hop nodded his head sleepily, and with long, tapering fingers rubbed the sand from his drowsy optics. As his vision cleared, the squalid surroundings of the little cellar he called home made themselves manifest.

Everything was in disarray. Even the tiny lamp filled with coconut oil, upon which he cooked the fruit of the poppy, was lying in the middle of the floor, while the little table upon which it usually stood was overturned. The long-stemmed opium-pipe lay on the ragged matting at his feet, while through the narrow door—which had partially swung ajar—filtered the damp, foggy air of morning. It was a rude reversal of the sights he had just been witnessing.

Chan viewed the flotsam and jetsam of his *lares* with lack-luster eyes. He was used to it. But as his gaze took in the surroundings in their entirety, his countenance registered terror and his jaw dropped. He was thoroughly awake now. With trembling knees he rose unsteadily to his feet and took a hesitating step forward. The cold, clammy hand of Superstition had been laid heavily upon him, because, with something more than awe, Chan realized that the counterfeit presentment of the little god of Good Luck had fallen from the tiny altarlike perch upon which he had been devoutely placed by an enthusiastic disciple, and was lying face downward on the floor.

Tremblingly, Chan Hop tiptoed forward and went down upon repentant knees as he lifted the little image reverently in fear-palsied hands. With the corner of his blouse he gingerly wiped away a smudge of iconoclastic soot which had sacrilegiously marred the contour of the deity's nose.

All this time the heart of Chan Hop was beating a rolling rataplan against his ribs. What a calamitous thing it would be should the director of Destiny resent this insult to his dignity! Did this happening herald some terrible disaster? Could it be possible that this good little god, who once upon a time had put both arms round Chan Hop's

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neck and kissed him, was about to withdraw the beatific light of his countenance?

On the sidewalk above his head Chan could hear the rapid patter of feet. With it came the sound of voices raised in earnest discussion. It was an unusual hour for so many people to be abroad.

Chan Hop slid over to the door and listened. A group of excited men and women paused above him and engaged in fearsome discussion. Chan could hear every syllable they uttered, and he gathered that they had been driven from their beds by an earthquake. The shock had been severe—almost equal to the big quake which had been followed by disastrous flames that had eaten the heart out of the city.

Small wonder these men and women were perturbed! But Chan Hop only emitted a great sigh of relief. "Gabbling geese!" he muttered to himself as he pushed the door closed. What cared he now about a thousand earthquakes? Was it not enough to know that what he had regarded as a catastrophe was due merely to a visitation of the elements? The good little god had only bowed to the laws of equilibrium. What was the matter with these cackling white devils, anyway? The earthquake was over—danger had passed. No material damage had been done—it was a closed incident. According to Chan Hop's reasoning, there was nothing to talk about.

CAREFULLY he replaced the good little god again upon his pedestal, muttering as he did so a singsong prayer replete with Chinese adjectives and loaded to the guards with devotion and apology. Chan felt relieved, but his personality, nevertheless, had been shaken to its foundations. Luckily, Chan Hop knew the panacea.

He took the little oil-lamp and lit it. Then from a mysterious recess he draw forth a tin box, and in a second or two a black pill skewered on the end of a knitting-needle was sputtering and hissing over the flame. After that Chan Hop stretched at length upon his bunk and inhaled the seductive aroma with long-drawn sighs of satisfaction. After a while his head swayed backward until it rested upon the little wooden block he called a pillow—and another silent drama of the dream-world began to take form.

This time Chan found himself in a desert country, an arid stretch so divested of vegetation that he fain would have retraced his steps. But while he hesitated there came a flash as of lightning and the good little god stood before him.

Chan Hop bowed to the ground in obeisance. But he who personally conducted good luck in its association with mere mortals stretched forth a hand and lifted him gently from the ground. Then, approaching closer, he cupped his hands and whispered:

"Go forth, Chan Hop!" Be a believer, O best beloved of the gods!"

And, thus encouraged, Chan had strode manfully on until he came to a high hill, which he climbed, and when he had reached the summit—lo!—a beautiful valley lay at his feet. The grass was as green as the heart of an emerald, and all the fruit-trees were in blossom. It was a kind of Dresden-china heaven. The fields were quartered off with broad, smooth ribbons of roadway, and on either side rose stately mansions, surrounded by gardens filled with rarest exotics.

Still, this was not by any means the most seductive claim on Chan Hop's approval, because a whole bevy of beautiful ladies were mincing their dainty way through acres of nodding chrysanthemums. Chan drew in his breath and emitted an exclamation of wonder. This must indeed be Cathay! His head was in a whirl. But the good little god was talking again.

"Before you lies the interpretation of the jeweled chalice with its dowry of gold. This is the miraculous land of enchantment, my Chan, for those gifted with the divinity of vision. It is only for the colossal-minded, who can see through and beyond. It is the heritage of those who can read the innermost thoughts of man as they would a proclamation nailed to the gateway of the city. The wisest cannot find this secret within the pages of any written word, and this rich reward is for the daring, for the subtle-minded and for the adventurous spirit. Be a believer, O my Chan; be a believer!"

And, with this, Chan Hop again awoke. The morning sun was now high in the heavens, but the spell of the dream was still heavy upon him, and all the wonderful happening therein was indelibly photographed upon his memory. He rose with exceeding cheerfulness, and as he prepared to set out for the scene of his day's labors, he mentally resolved that he would be guided in all

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things by the advice given him by the good little god. Chan had every confidence that he would be a great man some day.

WHEN Chan Hop first landed in San Francisco he attached himself to a racing-stable in the capacity of cook. Being a gambler at heart, he proved an adept pupil when it came to solving the cube root of the speed proposition. Once, it is true, a recalcitrant countryman had jobbed Chan out of the savings of years, but the good little god had stood behind our hero, and in the end he recovered his wealth with a considerable profit.

But after this happening Chan very wisely decided that there were much easier ways of getting a living than betting on horses, who sometimes left their speed in the stables, or on rattle-brained jockeys who could talk. In his own country Chan had heard a wise man say that only fools gambled on anything possessing the power of speech, and he had always treasured this analect as being the very quintessence of wisdom.

So, having pulled his chestnuts out of the fire, Chan tied his belongings in a small bundle and bade good-by to the race-track forever.

After some deliberation he went to work in a saloon, because I speak of those desperate times when patriots were privileged to bury their beaks in foaming tankards of death-dealing beer on sultry summer days. Oh, yes! Chan Hop lived in a terribly dissolute age.

In his new activity Chan presided over the lunch-counter. Every day, as regularly as the clock on the city-hall tower announced the noon hour, you could see Chan emerging from a mysterious back room wherein, behind closed doors, he practised the sacred rites of culinary art.

Arrayed in spotless white, he would come forth bearing a huge platter, and on that dish would repose, in glorious state, a mammoth ham.

You see, the bar was on one side of the long room and the altar upon which Chan Hop laid his burnt offerings was on the other. It was a metaphoric land, flowing with milk and honey. Custom had imposed certain set rules upon the patrons. First, it was usual to pay tribute to Bacchus, and having allayed his thirst, the fortunate one would cross the room to the abiding-place of Lucullus, which was at the same time the presidency of Chan Hop.

Here and now I challenge the combined congress of cooks of the world to produce Chan Hop's equal. Talk about your Virginia or Maryland or other vaunted hams! I want to rise in my place and, at the risk of being called "vulgar," state that the Chan Hop product could run away and hide from any ham at any time of the day or night, carrying any old weight, on any kind of a track, over any distance of ground, from one jump to the Rocky Mountains. This is a modest statement, but how do you like it?

Is it any wonder that Chan Hop was a personage of consequence, and is it not reasonable to suppose that many men of importance in the marts of trade found time to pay a visit to the saloon in which Chan presided during the lunch-hour?

Best of all, few came who did not leave some tangible token of their approval. Art is art, of course. But the material side of life must be considered, and Chan waxed accordingly prosperous. More than that, he often heard men juggle millions from one hand to the other as they lined up before his rostrum.

Big operators on the stock exchange talked of mastodonic deals in short, forceful sentences—transactions that meant thousands upon thousands of dollars. Little they guessed that, as they did so, they were kindling the flaming fires of ambition in the heart of the placid-faced Chinaman.

The world must be full of money, thought Chan Hop, and day by day the dream of the good little god took on added significance and strengthened Chan's belief.

But through it all Chan, the believer, was strong in the faith—in the faith that something would turn up that would bring him fame and fortune.

Sometimes he would hear men imparting to each other secrets of the stock-market, never suspecting that their celestial servitor either understood or was interested. But every night, when Chan returned to his humble abode, he took a handful of pink-paper slips and with a brush of camel's hair jotted down in quaint hieroglyphics notes of things he had heard during the day.

Occasionally, with grim, ironic humor, he recalled the fact that, in their ignorance, these people did not know that the ancestors

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whom he so devotedly worshiped had been the first to invent written characters, so that they might transmit their thoughts or records to posterity. That had continued through all the five thousand years of the different dynasties, going away back to the reign of Emperor Fu-Hsi, three hundred and seventy-six years before the coming of the white man's god. Perhaps Chan Hop had a premonition of what was going to happen. But no man can tell what was passing in his mind.

THEN, one day, a new patron entered the saloon, and, although it was a public place, this was a somewhat unusual happening. The average visitor to the city rarely found his way to The Mecca. It was for staid patrons whose business houses flanked it on either side, being far removed from the quarter where the frivolous life of the city lent the lure of atmospheric abandon to the seeker for thrills.

This individual came in at about seven o'clock in the morning. In years he could not have been more than twenty-five, and his habiliments were the rough corduroy of a miner. The alkali dust of the desert still powdered his shoulders. But he had youth, and that goes for a good deal when backed by a reasonable quantity of good looks and a certain careless bonhomie which usually makes acquaintances for its possessor and not infrequently inspires confidence.

The stranger evidently had money and was willing to spend it. One libation followed another in rapid succession. Moreover, as was the custom of the West, he was open-handed. Everybody who came in was invited to partake of his hospitality. Some accepted; others did not. But through it all the pilgrim never lost his good humor, and by the time the noon hour came, he was comfortably "lit up."

It was a cast-iron rule of The Mecca not to serve customers who had exceeded the speed-limit, and when the bartender perceived that his new patron had reached the line of demarcation, he refused another libation. This irritated the stranger not a little, and he protested vehemently.

"Why, I ain't half got started yet," he vouchsafed in tones redolent of aggrieved indignation. "I'm a full-grown man, an' I don't need no guardian. You just got to serve me or I'll know the reason why. What do you care? Ain't I got the price? An' listen, kiddo; price don't mean nothin' to me. Why, you pink-eyed son of a gun, I got a gold mine!"

The aggrieved one climbed on the foot-rail, the better to emphasize his remarks.

"You poor fish," he reiterated; "you don't know me a-tall, a-tall! I—got—a—gold mine! D'you get me—a gold mine? An' I want to throw some of it to the canaries. I'm a-goin' to buy some spotted paint for hobby-horses."

"Get outta here before I baptize you with the siphon," growled the mixologist roughly. "I've told you that you've had enough, and it's the rule of the house that we don't deal for no souses."

"Does—that—go?"

"It goes if you owned every hole in the ground between here and Cripple Creek."

"Well, that's all right; but you'll be sorry some day. You think I'm some hop-head full of funny fancies. But I ain't. If you was to see my little old plant an' watch me when I get busy with the pick and shovel, you'd want to play marbles with me—that's what you would! I got—a gold-mine!"

As the visitor made this statement of his assets, Chan Hop entered from the back room bearing the materials for the noonday lunch. Half-way down he stopped and listened. Something inside him told him that the stranger spoke the truth.

Could it be that the promise of the good little god was about to be fulfilled? Still, this was no time to debate the question. The material things of life had to be catered to, and Chan Hop sighed as he lifted the big dish onto the counter and busied himself with the customary preparations. Chan was harboring what is called in the vernacular "a distinct hunch."

After further futile and acrimonious discussion, the disgruntled customer removed his feet from the brass railing and staggered away from the bar. He lurched over to the counter where Chan was presiding.

"Did you hear what I was sayin' to that *hombre?*" he queried, with drunken gravity. "I was tellin' that bird that I hadda gold mine, an' he thinks I'm kiddin'. But you look as if you had human intelligence, even if you are a chink. Gimme one of them sandwiches an' I'll make your eyes pop outta your head."

Chan nodded gravely and proceeded to

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cut a slice of the succulent ham. He had heard all kinds of wild statements in the course of his mission. It had always been a source of wonder to Chan why the white man drank that which loosened one's tongue at both ends and impelled him to lay bare the most intimate things. Talking indiscreetly was a capital crime according to his way of thinking.

"You're the king of cooks," vouchsafed the stranger, with solemn approval, as he masticated the sandwich slowly. "You've got them all lashed to the mast—that's what you have, old kiddo."

He held out one hand for another helping and, as he did so, dug the other deep into the inner pocket of his coat.

"Seein' is believin', ain't it?" he queried. "Well, gentle slant-eye, here you go, and tell me if it ain't one on that owl-eyed pirate behind the bar which doesn't know a perfect gentleman when he sees one."

As he spoke he drew forth a small buckskin sack and, untying the string, dumped its contents on the board.

Chan Hop's eyes almost burst from their sockets as he gazed upon a little heap of golden nuggets. Moreover, he doubted his senses as his new friend picked up the largest one and tossed it toward him.

"Have some with me, old-timer," vouchsafed the other. "Buy yourself a stick of candy or somethin'. There's plenty more where that came from."

"Gold! Gold—gold for me!" exclaimed Chan in awestricken tones, as he lifted the shining metal, blankly regarding his benefactor. Words failed him. He was capable only of staring and wondering, while he repeated over and over again the magic words: "Gold! Gold!"

"No, you rummy; of course it ain't gold," laughed back the other in evident enjoyment of the Chinaman's amazement. "It's what I call caraway seed for the cuckoo-clocks. Shucks! That ain't nothin'! It's just chicken-feed. Scatter it in the right direction an' it'll catch every flounce in town."

"Mine? For me?" persisted Chan.

"Sure it's for you! Didn't I tell you I have a mine of it? What do I care about a few ounces? An' say—listen to me; I like you, an' I want somebody to cook for me in my shack out in the hills. I'll give you a chance to make more money than you ever dreamed of. Do you know what they used to call me before I got rich? The 'endless-motion kid.' That's me. These pusillanimous pikers don't know nothin'. You're just wastin' your time here with them. Join out with me an' you'll wear jewelery, but you gotta talk quick. None of this *mañana* business goes."

"When you go?" queried Chan Hop briefly, because all doubt in his mind had now been swept away. This was the appointed time, and he would show the good little god that when the Great Adventure presented itself, he would rise up to the occasion.

"Start to-morra mornin' at sunrise," returned the other. "I only come in to get some grub. I wouldn't stay in this tank-town if they was to give it to me. No siree! If you enlist, we'll hit the trail *pronto*."

"*Pronto!*" returned Chan Hop, not knowing exactly what the term meant.

"Right-o! An' lemme tell you somethin': I'll bet you that in less than a year you'll come back and buy this drum out from the cellar to the roof. When you do that, I want you to promise me that you'll pitch that monkey-faced ape behind the bar out on his conk. Now, how about it—are you goin' to play ball?"

"All lite; I play ball," purred Chan. He would have acquiesced in anything now.

"You're on," confirmed Chan's new boss. Meet me sunup, First and Jackson. I'll have a team there an' everthin'll be ready. Don't you make no bobble neither, because, if you do, I'll hang your hide on the fence an' fill it full of rusty nails an' broken glass. Savvy?"

So it was that Chan Hop began a new adventure and, passing from the scene of culinary triumphs, branched out into a line of endeavor which promised so much.

THE morning was yet young when Chan Hop and his new master took their departure from the city. The latter was as bright and chipper as though he had never looked into the bottom of a glass the day before. The wagon was filled with all kinds of provisions, but an inventory would have disclosed a preponderance of hams and several demijohns of liquor.

"You gotta live well or you can't work," vouchsafed Chan's employer. "I tell you, when I'm away out there 'rasslin' with the

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pick an' shovel, I need sustenance. I don't aim to get the willies. So I take my old side-kick, John Barleycorn, along for company. Folks'll tell you that you get lonesome in the foot-hills. Well, I guess you do if you don't keep your mind occupied—but that ain't my style."

Chan made no reply. There was little use combating any opinion advanced by such a masterful mind.

They were soon out on the desert, heading for the distant foot-hills.

Occasionally they stopped, and Chan's master had recourse to one of the demijohns. After a while he lifted up his voice in song:

"I'm a rollin', rollickin' son of a gun,
An' the child of a gamboleer."

He chortled blithely, singing the refrain over and over again. Then, when he had made another visit to the commissary, he shifted to the "Cowboy's Lament," beseeching any and all the dear friends of his youth to bury him where the grass was green and the daisies toyed with summer zephyrs.

His repertoire appeared unlimited, because when he had sung the very last verse of the "Lament," he switched to the melody of minstrelsy.

"Mistah Johnson will now sing, 'I'm Goin' Home,'" he announced, mimicking the grandiloquent manner of the interlocutor. "'I'm Goin' Home,' by the eminent antipodean barytone, Mistah Johnson."

He pulled up the horses, jumped out of the wagon and did a buck-and-wing dance for Chan's edification as, in a not unmusical voice, he shrilled forth this aria.

"Listens like the real thing—don't it Chan?" he interrogated, as he climbed back to his seat, all out of breath. "Say—the one ambition of my life, outside of ownin' a gold mine, is to have a minstrel show an' lead the parade every day. How'd you like to be walkin' back of me down the main drag of some hick town, with the band playin' an' you carryin' a wine-cooler full of the joy stuff in one hand, an' a long fan of peacock feathers to keep the flies off your boss in the other? Talk to me an' tell me somethin'. How'd you like that?"

Chan said nothing. In the first place, the owner of a gold mine was a privileged character, and, secondly, Chan did not subscribe to that brand of music. Whenever he felt elated, he took down his little two-stringed fiddle and toyed with its strings until it gave forth a twanging song of jubilation. This would have been accompanied by a joyous chant in high-staccato Chinese. Of course, he remembered that the ancient philosopher, Psang, whose teachings he had always regarded with veneration, set no store upon the acquisition of great wealth. But he smoothed out the wrinkles in his conscience when he remembered that Psang lived four hundred years before the beginning of the Christian era. The chances were that if this wise man had possessed the key opening the gateway to happiness, he himself would have made frequent use of it, especially had he lived in the present age of pessimistic unbelief in anything which did not savor of the tangible.

MILE after mile was traversed before they neared the foot-hills, and it was dusk ere they reached their destination. This proved to be a primitive log cabin hidden away down at the base of a dark cañon.

To Chan Hop there was something gloomy and forbidding about it, and for a moment he regretted that he had come. But again the thought of rich reward buoyed him up, and he busied himself transporting the stores from the wagon and preparing the evening meal.

Everything in the cabin was of the most primitive order—a few pewter knives, forks and some spoons. Half a dozen tin plates, an iron pot and a frying-pan, with a couple of saucepans, composed the tableware and cooking-utensils. The table had evidently been hewn out of rough boards, and a couple of old tree-stumps served as chairs. In one corner was a wooden bunk, on which were thrown carelessly a heap of blankets. It did not seem to have been made since its owner took possession.

"Some joint, ain't it?" ejaculated Chan's master, with evident pride, as he stretched out on the bunk and lit a cigarette. "Just as neat a little old hole in the ground as any man could want. 'Course it ain't no gilded palace, but it's got a roof which don't let in the rain, an' that's all any roof can do, no matter how much of the old jazzbo stuff they put on it. How do you like it as far as you have went, Chan?"

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"Her all lite," responded Chan briefly. "All lite bimeby."

Chan had often heard of the idiosyncrasies of the rich. The wealthiest man he knew in China lived in a hovel and boasted that it only cost him a few yen a day to live. It is a blessed dispensation of Providence that all men do not see alike.

"Now, to-morra," resumed Chan's mentor, as he pulled the blankets up about him and kicked off his shoes, "to-morra I'm a-goin' up to the little old mine and drag down a few shekels. Have chuck ready by daylight, because I've got to make a runnin'-start. It's the early canary that cops the kale. You can straighten things around while I'm gone—savvy? An', say, Chan; cook one of them hams just like you did down at the booze camp. Don't let anybody ever con you into thinkin' that that ain't your longest suit."

The speaker pulled the blankets up closer round his chin and tossed his cigarette away. For a while he was silent. Chan sat by the fire, watching the dying embers, thinking that his master had gone to sleep, but all at once the youth on the bed again broke forth.

"You do what I say, Chan," he enjoined, an' some day you'll walk right up to John D. Rockefeller an' you'll say to John—you'll say," he repeated sleepily. "You'll—say, 'Now look a-here, John!' you'll say—'I'm this—kind of a—*hombre*——"

But the rest of this potent prophecy was lost to posterity, because the mining king's voice trailed away and his head slipped down on the pillow.

IT WAS late the following evening when Chan's master returned. He had evidently been on a long hike and engaged in strenuous occupation, because he was both tired and hungry. Chan had everything in readiness for the evening meal when he made his appearance, and, contrary to custom, his usual loquacity appeared to have temporarily deserted him.

He merely nodded to his servitor, pulled one of the logs up to the table and began to eat, washing down his victuals with a tin pannikin filled to the brim with whisky and water. At length his hunger was satisfied and his thirst quenched. Then he found his voice.

"Well, Chan," he vouchsafed, "the ole hole in the ground ain't moved a inch since I was away. She's just as good as she ever was. A coupla of cracks of the pick an' a few shovelfuls of dirt, then washin' up, an' look what I got!"

He drew forth a buckskin pouch and tossed it in the air. It fell heavily on the table. Then he opened the mouth of the little sack and let the contents run through his fingers. There it was—virgin gold—in all its pristine purity. Chan moved forward and gazed with open mouth.

"It always makes me smile when I think of them poor city simps, livin' in their rabbit-hutches an' never havin' no vision nor nothin'. A feller has to have vision—don't he, Chan? If he ain't got that, he's like a deuce in the deck. Am I right, an' do you get me?"

Chan nodded a hasty affirmative. Here was gorgeous Midas himself talking, and he spoke of vision! Just as the good little god had done when he made a cup out of his hands and whispered into Chan Hop's ear!

Chan's master's voice slightly thickened from the result of his libations as he rambled along.

"Some day I'm a-goin' to take you up an' let you have a look at the Annie Slocum," he contined. "That's what I call her. Named her fer my best girl. Believe me, it was a joke on her, Chan, because she give me the go-by and run off with a dentist feller. Ha! Ha! Instead of havin' a hatful of gold, that gal'll have a hatful of teeth. If she was to see me now, Chan, I'll bet she'd hang her head for very shame. But I call the mine the same name I christened her in the first place. I'm a funny guy, I am. I believe in luck. If you ain't got that, you might as well throw up your hand an' call for a new deal all round."

Here it was—the good little god again! It was wonderful how great minds ran in the same channel.

"Now, Chan," resumed his master, "you've gotta have your share. I'm a-goin' to give you this biggest nugget. I needn't tell you to take good care of it, an' you ain't got no chance to spend it till you get outside."

He pushed a shining lump of metal across the table as he spoke. Chan reached for it eagerly. The dream was coming out all right and running true to form up to date.

Next day, however, Chan's master did

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not go to work. He lay on his bunk, dividing his time between eating, drinking and sleeping. Along about dusk he went out to look at the horses, but very soon returned.

"One of them trips takes a good deal out of a feller," he vouchsafed in way of explanation. "I just get all tired out. It's a long hike up there to the mine, an' I have to make it on foot. Perhaps I'll make a start to-morra—I dunno."

But several days came and went before Chan's master made another trip. From day to day he loafed about the cabin, always making the excuse that he did not feel equal to the journey. More than a week passed before he announced his intention of starting again. When he did go, he left at daylight and returned after dark. This time he brought with him another small sack of metal, and as before, gave a nugget to Chan Hop.

After this another week of idleness ensued before Chan's master again visited the mine. The result was the same as before.

But in casting up his accounts it dawned upon Chan that the nuggets given him by his patron were only worth ten to fifteen dollars apiece, and he began to ponder upon the fact that back at the old Mecca saloon his weekly intake was never less than thirty dollars.

Despite his belief, Chan began to waver and had to confess to himself that he was getting slightly nervous, because, regardless of how he summed up the matter, the new ledger would not balance with the old.

And the upshot of it all was that Chan made up his mind he must have some *prima-facie* evidence to stay him up in the faith. He trembled when he thought of what a terrible disaster it would be were his master to meet with a fatal accident up in the hills and the secret of the mine-location thus die with him.

SHORTLY after Chan had so taken counsel with himself, the mining king again set forth on another journey. It was in the dim light that preceded the dawn.

Hardly had he left the cabin when Chan donned his padded slippers and followed stealthily. He did not experience any trouble in keeping to the trail, because the noise of hobnailed boots rattling on the loose stones of the cañon guided him. Chan smiled to himself when he thought that his padded foot-wear made no sound.

Mile after mile was traversed by master and man. Away over the ridge of the big mountain and down the other side, through gulleys and washouts, doubling and twisting, evading places where the way was barred by great boulders, climbing, slipping and sliding, this unique pair toiled along, and at length day began to break.

Chan could now very plainly see the form of his master as he journeyed. Once the former looked back, and Chan feared he was discovered. It was a false alarm, however, but it was a warning to be more cautious, and luckily Chan was always able to keep some big rock or tree between himself and the man ahead.

Then the sun came up, gilding all things with wondrous magnificence, and as it cast its radiance upon the wild scene, Chan noticed that above him wound the trail which was the only connecting link between the hidden wealth of the hills and civilization.

The trail serpented its way down the side of the mountain, graduating its course to the valley below. If the travelers proceeded in a straight line, they would eventually strike it about half a mile beyond, and Chan's master headed in this direction.

At first Chan thought that he was going to cross the trail and ascend the mountain on the other side. But as he neared it he passed behind a big boulder and disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him. Chan dodged behind a clump of stunted cedars. He knew that his master could not leave the spot without being seen by him, and as for himself, he felt quite secure from observation. Chan was mighty glad that this strenuous journey had apparently come to an end, so he stretched out upon the ground and waited patiently.

Time passed, and Chan Hop began to experience a sensation of extreme drowsiness. He was not used to such violent exercise, and although he fought the coming lethargy, he finally succumbed and fell asleep.

When he woke the sun had already mounted high in the heavens. He judged that it would be between eight and nine o'clock. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he glanced cautiously about him. No

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moving, living thing was visible, with the exception of a black speck which had just surmounted the distant ridge and was coming in a cloud of dust down the trail.

Chan knew that this was the stage-coach which carried passengers between the mines and Sacramento. He watched it curiously as it swung down the steep incline. As it came closer he could see that the horses were galloping and the big coach swayed like a drunken man from side to side. In a few moments more it would be exactly opposite the place where he lay.

And then a most astonishing thing happened. Chan's master emerged from the shelter of the boulder behind which he had disappeared, and instead of the pick and shovel with which he had been equipped when he left the cabin, he carried a long repeating rifle in the hollow of his arm. Not only that, but the upper part of his face was concealed by a black mask.

This was not all. While Chan marveled, the sound of voices in the little hollow beside him reached his ears. Chan drew forward on his belly and peeked over a projecting rock. Not twenty-five yards below him were two slouch-hatted men on horseback. Each had rifles lying across their saddle-bows, and Chan's sharp eyes noticed that a shining star decorated the coat lapel of the older man. Chan Hop was not very familiar with the law, but he knew a sheriff when he saw one.

"We got him dead to rights this time," said the man with the star to his companion. "He's as clever as a pet fox, but if he gets away with another hold-up, I'll eat chopped sage-brush for the rest of my natural life. I wonder if he has any partners."

Chan Hop did not wait to hear any more. He stood not upon the order of his going—but went, realizing that it was no time either to tarry or indulge in airy persiflage. Fear lent speed to his feet, because all men know that the arm of the law has a long reach and what it clutches sticks to its fingers.

As a usual thing Chan was accustomed to make progress with a certain leisurely air wholly divested of celerity. But now, with long, swift strides, the fugitive devoured space as he hurled himself down the steep sides of the cañon. With the agility of a mountain-goat he leaped from rock to rock, and was in full flight, and going strong, as they say, when his foot came in contact with a root of stunted cedar and he went down flat on his face with a dull, sickening thud.

As he fell, something hard struck him full on the chest with such force that momentarily his breathing-apparatus was put out of commission.

Half dazed, Chan finally scrambled to his feet and shook himself as he passed his long fingers over his bruised chest. In doing so, his hand discovered the object responsible for his injury—the tiny image of the god of Good Luck! The same which his disciple had piously secreted in the pocket of his blouse before he started out on his adventure.

CHAN HOP, once president of the Believers' Club, now realized that he had been made the victim of misplaced confidence. Worse than that, insult had been added to injury, because it dawned upon him that even a god can kick a man in the heart. A dull, aching pain and a discolored area of yellow hide, reaching all the way from his wish-bone to his midriff, was *prima-facie* evidence of that fact.

Gone now was Chan Hop's vaunted philosophy. Absolutely obliterated was his faith in deities who specialized in driving the chariot of Destiny. Vehemently renounced was his credence and trust. Completely wrecked his belief in divinities, be they of any creed or condition. In his present frame of mind he would not have given a punched picayune for a whole flock of gods.

But the iron had dug deep into Chan Hop's soul and the law of retribution must be conformed to.

In the intensity of his anger he even forgot the happening up the cañon and the slouch-hatted men with the long rifles across their saddle-bows.

Ruthlessly he tore the little image from the mysterious folds of his blouse. Vindictively he pounded the painted face on an adjacent rock until all human semblance had been hammered out of it.

Then Chan Hop, one-time darling of the deities, braced himself and flung a discredited and mutilated divinity as far out into the yawning abyss at his feet as strength born of righteous indignation would permit.

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Her Arabian Knight

Just What Happened to a Stout Lady after Seeing a Movie Entitled "Passion Amidst the Pyramids" Is Related by a Humorist

By Richard Connell

Illustration by Harold Anderson

WINNIE weighed two hundred and twenty-nine pounds. Matter-of-fact dwellers in a matter-of-fact world called her fat. But this Winnie did not know, for she dwelt in a world of her own; and in this she was never more than—well, a maid of queenly figure. She was sitting, wrapped in reverie, on the edge of her own world that night.

To New York, darkness was coming. In the giant office-buildings of lower Manhattan gleamed a hundred thousand bright-lit windows. From her bedroom—three dollars a week in advance and no cooking allowed—Winnie Bout could see them. She sat there in the darkness, gazing out and up at the vast, dim shapes as they merged into the gentle blackness of the spring night. Vague mountains she saw, that would have been ghostly but for here and there odd, unstudied patterns of streaming orange-yel ow light.

To one of an unromantic nature those lighted windows might bespeak overtime toilers, but not to Winnie Bout; she was twenty-two. She held out her round young arms to the nearest and most luminous of the towering buildings.

"My Christmas tree!" she called softly.

Her favorite of them all was the great cathedral of business with its spired heights, from whose summit flamed a torch of red. On this, as on other nights, Winnie let her gaze dwell long on the lofty edifice, and her eyes were full of dreams and wishes.

"So this is your castle!" she said aloud, in tones of tender rapture. "Oh, Abdul-el-Kafar, my prince, how wonderously beauteous! To think that this should happen to little me! Ah, to dwell with thee in this palace till the sands of the desert grow cold!"

To this, Abdul-el-Kafar made no reply, for he was present in her tiny room in spirit only.

It could not be said of Winnie Bout that she had a natural gift for poetic expression or that, normally, she voiced her emotions with such abandon. Her phrases were borrowed from the moving-picture screen, specifically from a picture called "Passion Amidst the Pyramids," which Winnie had seen three times. Moving-picture titles have made poets of us all.

Truth to tell, in business-hours Winnie was aloof, brisk, dignified. This untrammeled mode of expression was reserved for that happiest hour of her day when, after her work behind the counter in Dignowity's delicatessen store, she came back to her furnished room, sat at her kimono-clad ease in a battered wicker chair and gave way to reverie. It was then that Winnie Bout really lived; her hours behind the bean counter were the unreal part of her life, a nightmare that recurred daily. Back in her three-dollar-a-week room—cooking strictly forbidden—she shook off the nightmare and talked with princes.

Princes? That was in the past. There was but one prince for her now; there had been but one since she saw "Passion Amidst the Pyramids." In it, as all

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Suddenly he uncurled, then curled, his mustache-ends with a deft, rapid gesture and said, "Name, please?"

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patrons of the silent drama will recall, was Prince Abdul-el-Kafar the noble-browed, brilliant-eyed, gleaming-toothed chieftain of a band of nomads. He votes, receives his mail and is shaved as Angelo Delmonte. In the rôle of intrepid and hot-blooded leader of his band of Bedouins, Abdul spies the blond beauty of Miss Evelyn Dalrymple, of New York, who is traveling in the desert, pursued by Sir Ruthven Mainwaring, scion of a noble house but cad at heart. Such strong emotions are kindled beneath Abdul's burnoose—local color for "shirt"—that into the desert air he breathes the memorable words: "At last! My mate-woman!" and swears by Allah to make her his. (Music-cue: "Pale Hands I Love.")

On his snow-white charger Abdul overtakes her caravan in the exact center of the Sahara at the precise moment when Sir Ruthven is basely trying to hug her on a camel. This makes Abdul pretty sore. Scorning to use his simitar or yet his yataghan, he uppercuts Sir Ruthven on his patrician chin, and this leads to blows. Both desert-chieftain and white aristocrat are, providentially, fairly showy rough-and-tumble fighters, and they indulge in a good many running film-feet of fisticuffs, almost upsetting a pyramid or two. A right swing to the Adam's apple puts the dastardly Sir Ruthven down for the count, and Abdul snatches up Miss Dalrymple, who has missed ten dollars' worth of fighting by fainting, and bears her off to his desert boudoir, that looks like an interior decorator's idea of heaven. He tries to hold her hand, but, to quote the subtitle, "Before the virginal armor of her glance, the prince shrank back." (Music-cue: "Less Than the Dust Beneath Thy Chariot-Wheels.")

She is a haughty captive for several hundred feet, and wears some charming negligees, of which, it would seem, the prince is a collector. Her glance, her trusting smile make him remember that he is a gentleman; so he behaves himself and goes off to hunt ibexes. Up comes a sand-storm. Abdul gallops across the desert to the rescue of his captive. Rescue her he does, but, in so doing, a panic-stricken camel kicks him in the head, and he swoons. For several hundred feet he hovers between life and death; but is nursed back to health by Miss Dalrymple, who, seeing his essential manliness long after the audience does, melts in his arms and says, "My mate-man!" (Music-cue: "Kiss Me Again.")

It's all right, though. Lest there be any question of the propriety of a blond Caucasian permanent wave being joined in wedlock to black-brilliantined locks, he confesses that he is really Harold Emerson Throckmorton, of a fine old cotton-mill-owning Boston family, who, disgusted with the tawdry glitter of Beacon Street, has spurned it for the simple life of a desert wanderer. He has, however, built himself on the edge of the desert a palace about the size of the Grand Central Station, and thither, arm in arm, go he and the no longer supercilious Miss Dalrymple, followed by a Baptist missionary from Des Moines, Iowa, who, as luck would have it, was passing at the moment. (Music cue: Mendelssohn's "Wedding March.")

With all her eyes and soul Winnie had devoured this drama. In her world of reverie she played it over and over. But Miss Dalrymple—otherwise Miss Peggy Charming—was eliminated, and her rôle was played by Winnie Bout. All that was left of Miss Dalrymple in the new version was her smile, which Winnie borrowed.

Over Winnie's golden-oak wash-stand hung a picture of Angelo Delmonte, cut from a motion-picture magazine. Winnie knew the legend beneath the picture by heart.

Angelo Delmonte, idol of the screen, snapped unawares at his country-place, Kum Rite Inn. He loves outdoor life, but speaks English with a delicious foreign accent, he being of a noble Spanish-Italian family but a naturalized American citizen.

To this picture Winnie turned from her contemplation of the glittering heights of her castle, and, apparently in reply to some questions, said:

"What was it that first attracted me to you, my prince? Oh, Abdul, it was your delicious foreign accent."

A KNOCK on the door startled Miss Bout from her musings.

"You may enter," she said in a voice that was, she hoped, queenly. It was her secret belief that she was a changeling, the daughter of a king, inexplicably left to be raised by her parents, who, before their demise, were in the delicatessen business.

Holding to this belief, she had cultivated

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a regal manner. It quite intimidated some of the customers who came into Dignowity's, where stern economic necessity compelled her to hold court daily from nine to six, with a pickle-fork for a scepter.

The girl who entered was a bony slip of a thing in a cotton-crêpe kimono. Everything about the newcomer seemed sharp—her eyes, her elbows, her chin, her voice and her manner.

"Lissen, Tiny," she said; "lemme have the loan of your frizzle-iron, will you? I got a date with Eddie."

"You will find the curling-iron on the chiffonier, Gertrude," said Winnie. It was the tone of a sovereign speaking to one of her ladies in waiting—gracious, yet majestic. "And, Gertrude, I've asked you before not to call me 'Tiny.' "

"Oh, all right!" said Gertrude, who also worked in Dignowity's delicatessen. "You can't help your shape, I s'pose."

"Gertrude!" Winnie drew herself up.

"Gee! This iron takes a long time to heat," said Miss Shultz, which was the name on Gertrude's fourteen-dollar-a-week pay-envelope. She began to make attempts to reach the back of her hair that a contortionist might have envied.

"Here! Let me do it for you," said Winnie. With deft fingers she manipulated the hot iron.

"You're a good kid, Winnie," said Gertrude gratefully.

"Where are you and Edward going this evening?" asked Winnie, with languid interest.

"To see a film," replied Gertrude.

"What one?"

" 'The Handsome Bedouin,' one of them desert things," replied Miss Shultz. "You know—the kind where they play 'Pale Hans I Love Beside the Cellar Door.' Say—who was this Hans, anyhow?"

"Hands, Gertrude," corrected Winnie. "Did you see 'Passion Amidst the Pyramids'?"

"Yeah."

"Wasn't Angelo—Mr. Delmonte—adorable?"

"Uh huh. Don't burn my ear."

Winnie busied herself with her tonsorial art. Then she said,

"Gertrude——"

"Yeah?"

"Wouldn't it be wonderful to be loved by him?"

"Who?"

"Angelo—Mr. Delmonte."

"Aw, he's a foreigner," said Miss Shultz.

"He's a naturalized American," returned Winnie, with a show of warmth.

"Why, in *Film Favorites* I read he can't speak English."

"He's got a delicious foreign accent," retorted Winnie. "And he's so masterful! Wouldn't it be just too wonderful to have a man like that swoop down and carry you off?"

"Not me," said Miss Shultz. "Eddie Meany ain't got a delicious foreign accent, but he's good enough for me."

Winnie shrugged her ample shoulders.

"I think it would be just heavenly," she said, and shyness was mingled with her queenliness as she said it.

Miss Shultz eyed Winnie critically.

"I guess you ain't in no danger," she said. Before her gaze Winnie winced. She sought to change the subject.

"Didn't you think Peggy Charming was a little—well, a little too thin for the part?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Gertrude. "Of course she wasn't much like you. She had to be little, or how could he have slung her over his saddle?"

"She looked a little skinny to me," said Winnie.

"Aw, you're jealous!" said Gertrude, with a sharp laugh. To this Winnie could offer no rebuttal; it was the truth.

THERE was a jaunty masculine ring at the door-bell. Miss Shultz gave her mop of hair a last hasty scrutiny in the cracked mirror.

"It's Eddie!" she cried jubilantly. "Thanks for frizzing me, Tiny." She skipped from the room.

Winnie turned out the gas that had been lighted to heat the curling-iron, sat down again in her wicker chair and gazed out at the panorama of the city. But the shapes outlined by their lighted windows seemed only office-buildings to her now. Stern reality was thrusting its disillusioning head into the country of her fancy. She could not escape the fact that no Eddie had come to take her out; nor could she avoid reflecting that no Eddie had ever come to take her out. A little while before, her fancy

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had furnished her room with rich and colorful tapestries, soft, thick rugs, chairs carved with armorial crests, inviting divans, rose-hued lights—had, indeed, transformed it into a spacious, luxurious apartment, worthy of the prospective bride of a noble gentleman with a delicious foreign accent.

Now she turned from her window and, by the unsympathetic rays of a street-light, saw it as it was—a crowded little room, papered with roses that had once been pink but which were now pale blurs, carpeted with a worn material that was no particular color unless it were brown. Her inviting divan became a narrow iron bed, her chiffonier a golden-oak chest of drawers needing varnish, her rose-hued light a single gas-jet in its petticoat of frosted glass.

She let herself sink down on the bed, and for long minutes she studied the ceiling. Why had she no prince—or even an Eddie? This was a question that had been forcing its way into her day-dreams of late. Until only a few months before her dream-romances had entirely contented her, but now vicarious wooings began to pall a little. She was growing tired of second-hand romance; hopefully, diffidently, she was beginning to reach out for the real thing.

She stood up, lit the gas and studied her face in the decrepit mirror. Yes; most certainly her complexion was better than Gertrude's. An unusually pink and glowing complexion, she, in all modesty, could say. And there was something queenly about her face; it wasn't sharp and pert, like Gertrude's. Also, her collar-bones did not show, as Gertrude's unquestionably did. Her figure, she had to admit, was not the sort that can be conveniently slung over a saddle; it was much too generous and heroic of mold for that. Statuesque! That was the word for it. She had seen the word used in a movie-title and had taken it for her own. She liked to think of herself as statuesque, something like Empress Catharine of Russia. Hadn't she been called "the Great"? Clearly this referred to her size.

"Empress Winnie—the Great," she said, softly.

Her eyes brightened as she turned toward a chair in the corner where lay new garments, to be donned for the first time next morning, Sunday, when she went to church and afterward for a stroll up Fifth Avenue. Her hands caressed the garments, and they trembled a little as they did so, for on the morrow she was going to essay a new and daring rôle. She was going to try to be a flapper.

She was taking this step on the advice of Gertrude Shultz, who was greatly experienced in the art. Shyly she had questioned Gertrude, and Gertrude had said:

"The trouble with you, Tiny, is that you're too up-stage. You act like you thought you was a queen or something. You got a Ritzy smile that don't fit on lower Seventh Avenue. You ought to giggle and you ought to flap."

"But that isn't my style," objected Winnie. "Besides, I don't know how."

Gertrude shrugged her sharp shoulders.

"Aw, all you need is the uniform," she said.

SO, AFTER consideration, Winnie Bout had bought the particular and peculiar garb which distinguishes the flapper. To-morrow she would test it. To-morrow she would try to forget that she was majestic, statuesque and probably the offspring of royal parents. And, since real romance had not come to her, she would set out in search of it.

During the past few months she had fumbled for romance. She had cajoled Gertrude into bringing young men, friends of Eddie, to call on her in the red-plush parlor of the rooming-house, but these princes had slipped away after a murmured "Pleased tuh meetchuh" and "Looks like rain, don't it?" never to return.

With Gertrude and a patently reluctant Eddie she had gone to several dances in the hall of the Algonquin-Rafferty Social and Athletic Club, of which Eddie was a member. To Winnie Bout they had been sorry affairs, for she had sat all evening in a corner, alone, obviously unwanted, and this despite the fact that she had tried very hard to be amiable, even coquettish. The young gentlemen of the Algonquin-Rafferty Social and Athletic Club did not, it would appear, care for statuesque girls.

She had gone to a surprise-party at the Bronx home of one her coworkers in Dignowity's. But when they played post-office and other hilarious kissing-games, Winnie's name had never been called.

As she ran over these events, Winnie Bout was forced to admit to herself that her

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search for romance had been perilously near a total failure.

To-morrow, she felt, would be a crisis in her life. It would tell her, she said to herself, if she could ever be attractive in the eyes of men and princes.

In the morning Winnie's alarm-clock woke her very early, and she dressed with infinite care. At last she was ready to sally forth, to conquer or to fail. Her final glance in the mirror was not very reassuring. She did look—well, rather wide, and her legs—well, she hadn't realized there was quite so much of them. However, bravely she set forth.

She was dressed in the garb of the younger generation. Her feet were adorned with flat, rubber-soled sport-shoes of banana-hued elkskin, with brown bands across the toes; her stockings were of the popular buffish tint; her skirt was plaid—rather violently plaid—and its brevity made even a casual observer aware that she had knees. Her light coat was of alleged camel's hair, and was of the type called "polo." Her shirt-waist had a generous, sweeping Peter Pan collar, and her tie was widely striped, even as a barber pole is. Her hat was the regulation free-and-easy straw, bound with braid and cocked at an angle that obliterated one eye entirely and imperiled the other. A rainbow scarf was twisted nonchalantly about her throat.

When church was over Winnie started on her stroll up Fifth Avenue. Inwardly she was trembling at her own audacity. Never in her twenty-two years had she done a thing like this.

At Fiftieth Street she saw approaching a young man, a very superior young man, in top-hat and morning coat, with a gardenia in his buttonhole. That he was dark and had a foreign air, she could tell, even when he was a block away. As his features grew more distinct, Winnie's heart stopped short. There could be no doubt about it. It was he—Angelo Delmonte!

Winnie gathered together all her courage. As he drew near she raised her eyes to his archly. She gave him a lingering little look; then she dropped them again. She ventured to look up. Her prince was looking at her. But he was not smiling; he was laughing! Not the least doubt in the world that he was laughing at her!

Flushing, sick at heart, Winnie hurried on. She took the elevated train back to lower Seventh Avenue. As she hurried homeward she heard a voice call:

"Well, look who's here! Why, Tiny!"

It was Miss Shultz, another girl, Eddie and a fellow member of the social and athletic club out for a Sunday stroll.

Winnie nodded to them as pleasantly as a numbed heart would permit. In the faces of Eddie and his friend she saw the same look she had seen in the face of her prince in Fifth Avenue. They were laughing at her. Their laughter pursued her as, with burning cheeks, she climbed the stairs to her bedroom. She was sitting in her wicker chair, her hands shut tightly, trying to keep out the truth and to keep back the tears, when Gertrude thrust in her head.

"You know what Eddie said, Tiny?"

Winnie raised her stricken face.

"What?" she asked feebly.

"He said," replied Miss Shultz, "that you looked like a load of hay going somewhere to be pitched." She slammed the door and rattled down-stairs again.

With dull fingers Winnie pulled off her finery, let it fall to the floor, lay down on her bed, buried her face in a pillow and tried to shut out the world.

WINNIE had to go to work that afternoon, for Sunday is a banner day in delicatessendom. As, in her white apron, she arranged the cold baked beans in their little paper canoes, something globular and damp rolled down her cheek and splashed into the beans. It was a tear. She glanced round guiltily, lest the agile eye of Mr. Dignowity should have seen. She felt that she could not bear a rebuke, or even a cross look. She felt that the world was staring at her, pointing its finger at her, laughing at her. But the thought that tortured her most was that no prince would ever come for her now.

Winnie was fat. That was her sin. Not just pleasingly plump, not just stylishly stout—fat. She did not spare herself now. She knew the cold truth. She had thought of herself as statuesque, but now——

Winnie weighed two hundred and twenty-nine pounds. It may strike the fortunate thin that it was odd that she had never noticed this damning fact until her twenty-second year. But what girl of romantic temperament will admit to herself that she

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is unattractive to men until the cruel truth is forced upon her?

Winnie couldn't help being like that. She inherited her physique and her romantic temperament. Some people are born fat; some attain fatness, and some have fatness thrust upon them. With Winnie it was a case of all three. She had been an unusually large baby, the daughter of adipose parents, and up in Harlem the tubbier a child the healthier it is deemed. It made Winnie's mother proud to have customers come into the Bout Delicatessen Emporium and say, as they pinched young Winnie's bulging cheeks or chubby legs,

"There's a fine, healthy child for you!"

Her father said it was a good advertisement for his business to have Winnie so palpably well nourished, and he permitted, even encouraged, her as a child to range at will among the macaroons, the pies, the potato chips and the candies. Odd bits of ham from the slicing-machine were her customary rewards for good conduct. Thus fat stole on Winnie unawares, and buried deep her romantic heart. When she grew a little older she wrapped herself round in dreams, made believe to herself that slender girls were jealous of her superior statuesqueness, closed the door of her mind to the horrid truth. Now the door was wide open; it could never be closed again. Winnie was fat. And she knew it. Oh, the unutterable tragedy of it! She could not keep back the hot tears.

Back in her little room that night, Winnie, her head in her hands, sat on her bed and resolved to be thin. She stood up resolutely. She tried to bend and touch her toes with her finger-tips. She almost reached them—almost. Her face grew peony-red; her head began to swim; she panted. She gave up after three bends, for fear of doing herself an injury. No; something more drastic than exercise, and less dangerous, must be attempted.

Earnestly Winnie Bout began to diet. Three starved and anguished months crawled their slow, hungry way in Winnie's life. She breakfasted on toast and weak tea, lunched on parsley and dined on lettuce and oranges. Twice she fainted as she gazed at the cold pork on Dignowity's counters. Valiantly she walked miles, always after dusk, for she had grown acutely self-conscious. She shunned scales. Hopefully each morning, however, she studied her face in the mirror. Yes; she was growing thinner. At last she went to the rear of the store and weighed herself. Round spun the indicator, and down went Winnie's heart, for the relentless pointer hesitated, quivered, then stopped. Winnie stared through the mist of her tears at the figures "228."

THAT little metal arrow was to Winnie the finger of Fate. To her it said that hope was gone. When she got back to her room that night she locked the door. She went to the wash-stand, over which the handsome features of Angelo Delmonte smiled a dazzling smile. For long minutes the sad blue eyes of Winnie Bout gazed into the rotogravure eyes of the knight of her dreams; then, with a fierce, despairing gesture, she plucked out the tack that held the picture in place, kissed the sepia lips, and convulsively crumpled up the picture and threw it into the waste-basket. Then, though the night was warm, she pulled down the shade to shut out the sight of the castles and tried not to sob too loudly.

In the morning her opening eyes fell on the clean spot on the wall-paper that the picture had covered. She forced herself to get up, to dress, to start for Dignowity's and work. She didn't know if she could get through the day.

Her route to her store led her past many bill-boards, and before one of these she stopped, for she saw the pink-and-white face of Peggy Charming, whose features were lit by that bewitching smile known to picture-lovers the world over. Winnie paused to ponder. Whatever happened, Winnie reflected, Miss Charming smiled. Captured by brigands and in imminent peril of being carried off to a fate worse than death, she smiled. Bound hand and foot in the path of an onrushing locomotive, she smiled. As a tenement drudge, beaten by alcoholic parents, she smiled. Always she smiled until romance came to her.

Winnie thought about this as she trudged on to work.

Her mind had been casting about hungrily for something to compensate her for the prince that could never be. It occurred to her that here was a new rôle she could play. She would smile, although her heart was breaking. She knew that her smile could

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never have the devastating effect that Miss Charming's had. No; it would not be that kind of smile. It would be a patient, brave smile—the smile of one concealing a secret sorrow, a pensive smile that would say to any one who cared to analyze it: "The world has not used me well, but I forgive it. See? I smile." She practised this smile as she took her stand behind the counter and began to do some landscape-gardening with olives and salmon salad.

"Hello, Tiny!" called Gertrude Shultz from her counter. "Why so happy? Got that dark, handsome feller?"

It cost Winnie an effort of will, but she smiled back. The other girls in Dignowity's noticed it. They teased her.

"Winnie's in love," they said, nudging each other and giggling.

"She's got a sweetie."

"Is he a count or a dook?"

"Take me out in your Rolls-Royce, Tiny."

"Can I come see you when you got a castle?"

"Has he a delicious foreign accent?"

In unguarded moments in the past, Winnie had confided her dreams to some of them. She regretted that now. To their banter she returned a smile. But there was no smile in her heart. For as it beat it seemed to say: "Too fat! Too fat!"

HOWEVER, clinging to her resolution, she bestowed a smile on all her customers. Age or sex mattered not. What could a man mean to her now? She almost stopped smiling as this thought crossed her brain. But she didn't. She smiled at the customer who had huskily ordered some cold beans. He smiled back—a surprised, almost frightened smile.

"Anything else?" asked Winnie, smiling.

"Nudding," said the customer. He reached out a huge hand for the little canoe of beans. The timidity of his voice and manner was not at all in keeping with his big, bulging shoulders that fitted tightly into his blue suit. He was not tall, or fat, yet his shoulders seemed to fill the store. His face was tanned, and his mustache curled in a tight black curl on either end. He took his beans, made a queer, ducking bow to Winnie and shouldered his way out.

"Hey, Winnie, who's your friend?" called Gertrude Shultz.

"Is that the dook?" called another girl.

"Why, here he is again!" exclaimed Gertrude.

The man with the bulgy shoulders had returned. He seemed disconcerted to find Winnie smiling at him; he approached her counter slowly, met her glance, looked away, embarrassed.

"Piggle," he said in his husky voice.

"Piggle? I beg pardon?"

"Piggle," he repeated, pointing.

"Oh, pickle."

He nodded emphatically.

Winnie speared a large green pickle swimming with its mates in a glass aquarium. The stranger solemnly laid down a dime, grasped the pickle and, with another ducking bow, bore it away.

In the afternoon, after a hard day, during which Winnie forced herself to smile only after some severe inner struggles, she was sitting wistfully staring at the bowl of mayonnaise when she became aware that some one was standing at her counter. She looked up, smiled. It was the man of the bulgy shoulders.

"Piggle," he said shyly.

She captured a pickle from the tank, and he carried it away. Again she returned to her melancholy musings. A customer at her counter brought her back to the world of reality. With a little start Winnie recognized the buyer of pickles.

"Piggle," he said. His tone was plaintive.

With a smile Winnie gave him his pickle. For the smallest part of a second he dared to raise his black eyes to her blue eyes. Then he made a ducking bow and vanished from the store.

In her room that night, Winnie did not smile. That rôle was reserved for the day; it helped her get through the long work-hours. In the morning, shortly after she had taken her place behind the counter, the man with the bulgy shoulders made his appearance. He advanced to Winnie's counter with a more determined stride, opened his mouth as if to say something important, thought better of it or else lost courage, and said simply,

"Piggle."

Winnie smiled.

"Say," she said affably; "you'd save time if you bought 'em by the dozen."

He actually blushed beneath his tan.

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Suddenly he uncurled, then curled, his mustache-ends with a deft, rapid gesture and said,

"Name, please?"

"Beg pardon?"

"Name?"

"My name?"

"Yes. Sure."

"Winnie."

"Weenie?"

"Yes."

Confusion seemed to overtake him at this point. He seized the pickle in his brown hands and carried it off as if he were performing a religious rite.

Some busy hours passed. Winnie turned from the butter-tub to find the man with the bulgy shoulders gazing at her intently. There was a curious light in his eyes. Somehow, it made Winnie blush.

"Piggle, Weenie," he said in a tone of almost abject deference.

She covered her own confusion by pretending to search the aquarium for the largest pickle. He took it, bowed, departed.

The long day in the store was nearing an end, and Winnie was trying not to think of the cheerless evening ahead of her in her hall bedroom when she heard, or, rather, felt, the presence of a customer. She looked. It was the bulgy buyer of pickles, who had come in softly and was watching her. She saw that same odd look in his black eyes.

"Piggle, Weenie," he said, almost reverently.

"Say," remarked Winnie; "you must be fond of pickles."

The bulgy man shook his head.

"I hate zem," he said sadly. "Zey make me seek."

"They make you sick?"

"Veree, veree seek," he affirmed.

"Then why do you eat them?"

"I don't eat zem."

"You don't eat them? Then what do you do with them?"

"I throw zem away," he said, twisting the pickle in his hand in his embarassment.

"Do you mean to say you buy good pickles to throw away?" Winnie stared at him.

He gazed at the shining buttons on his tan shoes. He nodded.

"But why do you buy them?" Winnie persisted.

He looked up at her with sudden courage,

"Because, Weenie," he said, "you smile when you sell zem to me."

"But I—I don't see—" faltered Winnie.

"Outside, by the gutter, I will await you," he said. "Zen I will tell you, O daughter of the sun!"

IT MUST have been after midnight that night when Miss Gertrude Shultz, in her hall bedroom on lower Seventh Avenue, was wakened from her slumbers by the excited entrance of Winnie Bout.

"Wake up, Gertrude; wake up!"

"Fire?" asked Miss Shultz, sitting up in bed.

"No. Me."

"You, Tiny? What's the row?"

"Guess."

"Guess what?"

"He said I was more beauteous than the full moon over the Bosporus!"

"Who? What——"

"And he said my smile was like a wreath of stars shining down on Stamboul!"

"Tiny Bout, are you sober?" Miss Shultz stared at Winnie.

"Yes, yes, yes! And he said that in his country I'd be considered very beautiful." Winnie hesitated and blushed. "Only—if anything—I was a little underweight."

"Who said this?" demanded Miss Shultz.

"The prince—my prince!"

"Your prince?"

"Yes, Abdul. We're to be married Saturday."

"You? Tiny? To a prince?" Miss Shultz took the tone of one humoring a lunatic. "I suppose he's got a milk-white stallion."

"He has," replied Winnie proudly. "Six of them. I saw them."

"You saw them? Where?"

"Madison Square Garden."

"The circus?" Winnie nodded. "Say," questioned Miss Shultz; "what kind of a prince is he?"

"I don't know exactly," admitted Winnie, "but on the bill-boards it says he is Abdul, the equestrian prince from Constantinople."

"Equestrian?" Miss Shultz wrinkled her sharp forehead. "Never heard of Equestria. Where is it?"

"I don't know," said Winnie; "but I'll get the prince to take me there."

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Strong, Important—a Drama of Living, Human People

The *Public Square*

Dicky Cobden Finds the Story of the Age and Becomes a Citizen of the World. Pidge Is Faced with a Question That Has Two Possible Answers

By Will Levington Comfort

Illustrations by C. R. Chickering

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story is here up to this issue.

BACK in 1913 the lives of several people became deeply interwoven in a lodging-house in Greenwich Village, New York city. First of all was Pidge Musser, who came from California to make her name in literature and to break away from her life with her father, Adolph Musser, a Los Angeles metaphysician, who talked "handsome" but did little. There were Miss Claes, a cultured half-caste woman who ran the lodging-house, and Nagar, a Hindu disciple of Gandhi, who helped her. Miss Claes's house was like an office of the world, but Pidge didn't pay much attention to world-politics. She was sick of talk. In her little back room, half starved to death, she wrote her first novel. She never would have finished but for Miss Claes's artful gifts of food.

Nagar sold a story about Gandhi to the *Public Square*, a radical weekly of New York, and this story interested Richard Cobden, assistant editor, to the point that he came down to the village to get better acquainted with the Hindu. Here he fell under the spell of the "world-office" and Miss Claes, but especially under the romantic spell of Pidge. Her novel was offered to the *Public Square* as a serial, but Dicky Cobden was not told that Pidge had written it. He reported that the book was impossible. Still, the secret of authorship was kept. Pidge went to work in a can factory, pasting labels. Life was hard, and when Dicky Cobden offered himself as a husband, Pidge's temptation was great, but she broke away from him in the heat of his entreaty, saying she didn't want him for what he was but for what he had. Dicky belonged to a rich and long-established New York family.

Dicky was proving out as a one-woman sort of man. After he had gone to Africa Pidge found that he had arranged to make life easier for her by giving her an editorial position on the *Public Square*. In this work she met Rufus Melton, a struggling young story-writer, who fascinated her as Dicky Cobden had never done. When Dicky returned he and Pidge tried to be friends, but his love for her complicated that, and finally Pidge demoralized him a second time by confessing that Rufe Melton had kissed her, and that, although she knew him to be a liar and an egotist, something in her was still attracted; in fact, the affair was "unfinished."

Dicky, hopeless, but incapable of forgetting, went away again, this time to the

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Near East as a correspondent, and later to India, where he received Pidge's letter that she had married Rufe Melton. In deadly coldness and revulsion he suffered for weeks in India, finally getting to Ahmadabad, where Nagar and Mahatma Gandhi were. A curious miracle happened during his first interview with the Hindu leader. In Gandhi's presence his love for Pidge came back full-powered, and such a sorrow for her plight in falling for a man like Rufe Melton that a surging pity took the place of the deadly cold hatred which had brought him low. Dicky would have stayed on in India, but Nagar and Gandhi made it clear that his duty now lay in France with the fortunes of his own countrymen.

Pidge, in New York, had brought to Miss Claes's house a girl named Fanny Gallup, who used to sit beside her at the pasting-bench at the can factory. By nature unmoral, Fanny was badly run down, abandoned by a husband, with two small children on her hands. Pidge helped in their support. Her life with Rufus Melton in Miss Claes's house had so disillusioned her that the withdrew herself from him save in outward form only.

One morning, while Pidge was at work in the *Public Square* office, Rufe answered Fanny Gallup's lure on the way up-stairs and entered her room, from which he presently emerged, disgusted. In love with Rufe, Fanny taunted Pidge that night with her inability to keep her man, and made clear in a most graceless fashion all that had happened.

Rufe learned that Pidge knew, and slipped away to France. There he got into serious trouble with the father of a French girl. A group of American correspondents had undertaken to help Melton out. Dicky heard the story, and single-handed saw the job through, heart-balm amounting to several thousand francs. Rufe Melton went back to New York and Pidge. Then the armistice, and a letter from Nagar that the story of the age had started in India and that Dicky had better report. In New York, on the long way round, Dicky found that the war had about done for the radical *Public Square*. In fact, Pidge's work had been the one saving factor. He bought controlling interest, and arranged to keep the paper alive while he was away.

Pidge and Dicky had seven flawless days together in Los Angeles. The bigger romance loomed, but the girl was tied to Rufe Melton. Still, a new mystery dawned between them. In India Dicky now found that Gandhi had the biggest following of any world-leader. The American reached Amritsar on the eve of the darkest disaster in the history of British rule. Carried along in the preliminary rioting on the morning of April 10, 1919, he was knocked down with one of the bullets that the British fired into the crowd. A native, thinking him one of the English, leaned down and struck him. A Hindu friend of Nagar, coming to the rescue, heard the unconscious American mutter something that sounded like "Pid-gee—Pid-gee!"

DICKY came to his senses in an apothecary shop where Lala Relu Ram had carried him.

"The bullet didn't think enough of you to stay, Mr. Cobden," the young English surgeon said, after examination. "It merely bit out a chunk of muscle and went its way. Since there is no cavity for it to drain into, it means nothing but a stitch or two and a clean bandage. But you've been considerably mashed about the face. There's going to be a strain on your drainage system for a few days to carry off dead tissue."

The patient was taken to his room at the inn and much bandaged, and Lala Relu Ram sat by his bedside, his face often turned to the open window overlooking the street.

"I'm all right—don't stay," Dicky urged.

He sent Lala Relu Ram below on one pretext after another, knowing that the young man was exhausting himself from strain to hear all that had happened.

"It is more terrible than we supposed," the student reported, as the long day ended. "Enraged by their dead and wounded, my people have burned buildings, bank-buildings—the National, the Chartered, the Alliance Banks——"

"That's hitting them where they live," said Mr. Cobden, impelled to Americanisms as never before.

"Sir?" said Lala Relu Ram, bending forward on the scent of the idiom.

"A government bank is a British nerve-center, Lala Ram," Dicky said.

The student was thoughtful, and then resumed:

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"Also the town hall, the mission church, the depot of the Punjab Religious Book Society—that not being the worst. It is with sorrow that I have to confess that my people have forgotten themselves in the case of Mr. Stewart and Mr. Scott, of the National Bank and Mr. Thomason, of the Alliance Bank——"

"Hurt?" said Dicky.

"Dead," said the student, with a dramatic pause. "Beaten to death where they live."

Dicky's eyes squinted under the cloths.

"And what of your own people?" he managed to ask.

"Oh, many have been killed!"

This was an item that did not require the enumeration of details. The student reported at nightfall that the English were silent and terrible, that the entire foreign community living in the civil lines was now being removed to the fort in Ram Bagh, and the headquarters of the civil authorities transferred to the railway station.

"Also, more troops have been sent for from Lahore and Jalandhar," Lala Relu Ram said in an awed tone.

"I'd like to doze a little," said Dicky.

Lala Relu Ram rose, but lingered.

"Would Cobden Sahib permit me to ask one question?"

"Why, of course! Shoot—I mean—ask it."

"It is about that moment when you fell," said Lala Relu Ram. "Rather, it was when I reached you, and had driven off my people, who thought you were one of the English——"

"Yes."

"You were partly out of the body—unconscious. Yet your eyes were open, and you were speaking some word that I have never heard—several times, as you would speak the Holy Name in devotion, with breathing."

"What was that name?" Dicky inquired, pulling the bandage down farther over his eyes.

"It is not one which I have ever heard in my speech or yours—that is why I ask. It was like this: 'Pid-gee—Pid-gee.' "

Dicky laughed.

"That is—the fact is—now, that's right curious," he said. "I must have been 'out of the body,' as you say. That—that is a little expression we use in childhood."

As Nagar stood under the light that evening, Dicky saw that his eyes, too, were burning with strange sorrow. Lala Relu Ram bowed himself out, walking backward. When they were alone, Nagar came to the bedside, drawing a chair, and his hand found the American's.

"We have not done well in Amritsar to-day."

"I don't think you understand it quite," Dicky said. "I was there this noon, at the place they call the Hallgate Bridge——"

"There was violence," said Nagar.

"There were three volleys."

The Oriental smiled.

"It is not the provocation that we deal with, but the losing of oneself in anger. Nothing remains to us but the fact that Amritsar lost its self-control."

"I'm just a bystander, of course, Nagar, but I can't help wondering a little at what you ask of your people. Living God! They turned the other cheek. They took the first volley—and the second. I was there. No man has three cheeks." Nagar's hand pressed his and, though his voice had not been loud, Dicky continued in a lowered tone: "Anything might have happened that instant had there been a bit of leadership. The people wanted to talk to their English father—the deputy commissioner. Their dead were at their feet, the cries of the wounded in their ears, and still they weren't maddened. They only wanted to show their petition. I'm not against the English, but the natives should have been permitted to go forward with their little paper. Your people are only human——"

"Mahatma-ji's ideal isn't human, Richard. It is the 'soul.' "

Dicky started up.

"I've got a lot to learn about this man's India," he said.

At this moment there was a servant at the door with a cablegram for Richard Cobden. It was from Pidge, saying that all was well and moving forward steadily, and that a novel had been procured for serial use in the *Public Square*.

TOWARD the end of the afternoon of Sunday the thirteenth of April, 1919, Richard Cobden ordered a carriage. He was still bandaged about the head; his left arm was in a sling. This was his first descent from his room since his hurts, three days before, and, meanwhile, General

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Fyatt had taken control of the city, bringing in troops from near-by stations. Dicky had met Fyatt in France, and was on his way now to pay his respects to the general.

The carriage continued on the way to the Ram Bagh until it was halted for the passage of troops in the street—a half-hundred Goorkhas and Baluchis, an English officer in the saddle, two motor-cars with more English officers and civilians, the whole outfit trailed by a pair of armored cars and moving in the direction where the government plane had hovered.

"Where are they going?" Dicky asked of his driver.

The man was not sure, but suggested the Jallianwalla Bagh.

"What is that place?"

"It is a *maidan*," the man said, "a big open square, a public place."

"Public square," Dicky muttered, and this made him think of the cablegram from Pidge.

"Turn in short after the armored cars," he commanded the driver. "Follow close."

The driver obeyed.

TO DICKY, that afternoon, Amritsar was a place of heated and offensive stenches. As they passed through hot and narrow streets, certain of these odors startled his comprehension because they were so subtly vindictive. The thought occurred to him, as he watched the naked children playing in the wet shadows, of what a correspondent had remarked in Cawnpore, that it was hard to tell whether the streets soiled the children or whether the children soiled the streets. The movement forward was very slow, and Dicky bent to inquire at length if they were still moving toward Jallianwalla Bagh.

"Yes; it is very near," said the driver, churning at the lines with both hands.

The carriage now approached a narrow lane—a "*kucha*," the driver called it. The armored cars ahead were having difficulty in this constricted place. Finally they halted, and Dicky heard a British soldier on the nearest turret call out that they could proceed no further. His own vehicle was, of course, blocked. He let himself to the ground, ordered the driver to wait and followed the soldiers through the wet, trampled lane.

A minute later he was in the broken ranks of the Goorkhas—little muttering men with big sprawly hands, holding fast to their rifles, fingers running loosely over breech and stock and barrel. The halt had come because there was a sudden rise to the ground—a mound of earth closing the lane and running at angles to each side. The soldiers were ordered up and deployed along the mound, equally divided to the right and left.

Now Richard Cobden, in the midst of the officers and civilians who had occupied the two motor-cars, also gained the eminence with some pains; and at this point he saw the man he had started out to find this afternoon—General Fyatt, a significant picture, indeed, here in Amritsar, who had been but one obscure exhibit in the broad gallery in France.

Fyatt didn't see him, and the American looked over the vast assembly of natives in the burning light—from twelve to fifteen thousand people, he estimated. On a raised frame toward the center a Sikh speaker stood.

All native faces were now turned to the soldiers—waves of faces. It was as if the color of a tree had changed by a steady pressure of wind that showed the under side of all the leaves. Now Dicky heard from General Fyatt the low, single sentence:

"You may give the order."

"Fire!" a young officer called to his Goorkhas.

To Richard Cobden it was quite incredible, but another officer on the far side of the lane repeated the command and the line of leveled rifles spurted on either side. Dicky winced at the crashes. He had been in the firing-pits many times, but one can never remember how these concussions close by hurt one's head and spine. Of course they were firing blanks. This was martial law. The people had been ordered not to assemble and they had disobeyed—twelve thousand of them or more. General Fyatt had undertaken to impress upon them that his word was law, martial law. Of course, this was also the English answer to April tenth at the Hallgate Bridge. A bit uncouth to stampede a big crowd like this!

Surely Fyatt couldn't realize what this firing of blanks would mean. They were trampling themselves to death already! This wasn't English humor. It was more like the fool who yells fire in a packed theatre.

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The great open place was walled. There were no broad exits. The several narrow vents had locked of themselves by the pressing of bodies against them. "Why," Dicky thought, with a wrench and shiver at the sight of the monster throng in the process of constricting itself; "why, this is a womb of death!" Cries were sustained at the end of this April holiday—cries of battle and accident and pestilence, the cries from a great ship going down. Dicky thought of a pot beginning to boil. He thought of a yard of leaves suddenly caught in a swirling wind. He thought of all the old stale similies used and overused since bloodshed began, and sank back in the hollow of hopelessness. It couldn't be told, but his mind tried again and again, even though his heart sobbed with the people.

A great square of colored cloths in the sunlight—from twelve to fifteen thousand human beings listening to a man who cried out against violence, who cried out that the government couldn't hurt its children—suddenly being ground in the great crush of fear, being sprayed with rifle-fire—blanks, of course—but to a result almost as deadly, for the people were destroying each other. They didn't mean to, but they were trampling each other to death. Thus his mind viewed and reviewed—all this in a matter of seconds.

NOW Richard Cobden saw something he didn't understand. Down in the *maidan* on the ground, not fifty feet away, a giant Sikh in white turban, running forward with raised hands, like a messenger—a close-up for Dicky's eyes alone—suddenly halted, spun and slapped limply to the ground with a curving fling. A glorious fall, if it had been a bit of acting—the fall a man makes when a bullet hits him.

But Dicky was quite possessed with the idea that the soldiers were firing blanks.

At this point an English officer roared at his Goorkhas, who apparently had been firing high. His words were in vernacular, but the American saw the little dark men shorten their range.

Thus it dawned upon him slowly, as if he were a very stupid man, that General Fyatt was punishing Amritsar indeed—in fact, that the general was making a day of it.

Almost directly across the square the wall was low, less than six feet. Hundreds were jammed against it, but their bodies were so locked by the pressure from behind that no one could climb or be pushed over into safety.

The Goorkhas looked like monkey men. They stamped queerly as they pumped. They were being told what to do and were in a great concentration to obey exactly. They emptied their magazines, each man taking his own time, and halted to fill them again, carefully avoiding with their fingers the burning metal of the barrels as they filled and fired.

An English civilian, an elderly man, face livid, lurched past, muttering:

"My God! I can't watch this."

Another Englishman followed him, venting an hysterical laughter—both faces Dicky had seen in one of the motor-cars. For an instant it seemed the only sane action left in the world—to rush out into the lane the way he had come, as these Englishmen were doing, to cover face and ears, to rush forth, to continue to the ends of India and the uttermost parts of the earth.

Cobden started to follow, but turned back. No; he wouldn't rush off to be sick. This was the wall the twisted ascetic of Cawnpore had said he would come to. It was something else. What was it? Oh, yes; it was the Big Story that he had been pacing up and down the world to find. Of course it would be like this. He would find himself in the midst of it, without knowing at first.

He ducked forward under the rifles of three sepoys to reach the staff. He stumbled over a soldier on his knees—a Baluchee, vomiting with all his might. He saw Fyatt a few paces forward—Fyatt, grizzled-haired, square-shouldered, behind a field-glass. A man didn't need a field-glass to cover the *maidan*. One could see the faces; one could see the fallen; one could see the writhing cords of human bodies. Oh, no; one didn't need a field-glass. One could see the thousands on the *maidan* now—as one upturned face, the face of a child betrayed but unable to believe. Fyatt merely chose this way to cover his own face. His back looked stiff and blocky as he swung slowly round behind the glasses. His shoulders and neck didn't move. He turned from the hips, Dicky perceived, as he touched the general's sleeve.

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A note of unison had come to the great cry from the people at this moment—one note that tugged at the white man's soul—the deadly hurt of a child. General Fyatt was not tall for a soldier—with square lines of figure, square of chin and temple and shoulder and elbow, pivoting on his hips. But there were two remarkable curves in the ensemble, the sidewise curve of the hooked nose and the bow of his booted legs. Now, as the American stood by, a new key presented itself to the man—that hooked smile. It opened other hooks—hook of the eye-corner, as well as the corner of the mouth and the bent nose, hook of the fingers on the field-glass. The face turned to him, a white welt from the glasses on the bridge of the nose.

Dicky felt the horrible slowness over everything—that somehow there was not in this man's volition the power to order the firing to cease. No recognition showed in Fyatt's eyes. He stared. It was like the man who had stared at him on the docks in Bombay when he heard that America had entered the war.

"Well, sir?"

Dicky felt rebuked. Then came to his ears again the terrible drowning cry of the children.

"I only wanted to ask—" He stopped and raised his voice above the tumult of shots and voices. "Cobden, of New York—saw you in France——"

It was utterly ridiculous to yell one's identity. He had forgotten that his face might look different under a bandage. The field-glass that had been partly raised again was whipped down. The hooks tightened.

"Ah, Cobden! Heard you were in town. Busy, you know."

"I see!" the American yelled back. He felt like a maniac. "I see! I merely wanted to ask, General, if you had gone mad—or have I?"

A young officer ran between them, reporting that the ammunition was running out.

"Sixteen hundred and fifty rounds, sir. Mainly used up. Some of the men finished——"

"Ease them off back to the armored cars. Let the others finish firing—fire low."

"Not much wasted—only at first, sir."

Fyatt turned to Cobden, shouting the words as to a deaf man:

"Didn't catch what you said! Teaching Amritsar a lesson! Plover says we ought to take a thousand for one! Teach them to assault women——"

"Isn't the lesson taught?" This time Dicky didn't yell.

"They haven't dispersed yet."

"Dead men can't disperse, General. The rest can't get out——"

Cobden walked away. He had looked again at the *maidan*. Everything was overturned. The thousands were prone or kneeling.

If one steel rifle-bullet plows through sixteen inches of oak, how many human bodies will it plow through? How many will sixteen hundred and fifty steel bullets? No shots wasted since the first minute or two. They couldn't be all down—wounded or done for. Suddenly Cobden realized that many of the people were now praying. He was back at the head of the lane, moving in circles like a man who has been beaten on the head. A black-coated Englishman with a clergyman's vest grasped him by the arm, peering into his face—eyes gone utterly daft. He shook Dicky's arm and pushed it from him, then ran to a soldier near by and peered again.

"Tell it to the general!" Dicky called absurdly; but his words weren't heard.

Now he saw one of the elder civilians who had escaped a few moments before coming back. He scrambled upon the mound from the lane side and inquired of the earth and sky,

"I say—can't he stop?"

"He's dispersing the people," Dicky called.

The firing was desultory now. He heard orders for it to cease entirely.

"We might need a cartridge or two in the streets going back," a voice behind him said.

"We've got the armored cars," another answered.

Then Richard Cobden happened to look at the west and found the sun still high in the sky. This struck him as altogether peculiar.

COBDEN found himself in the lane, turned away from the *maidan*, his hands lifted and clenched. From behind still came the sounds of a ship going down—all but down—the firing ceased. In front

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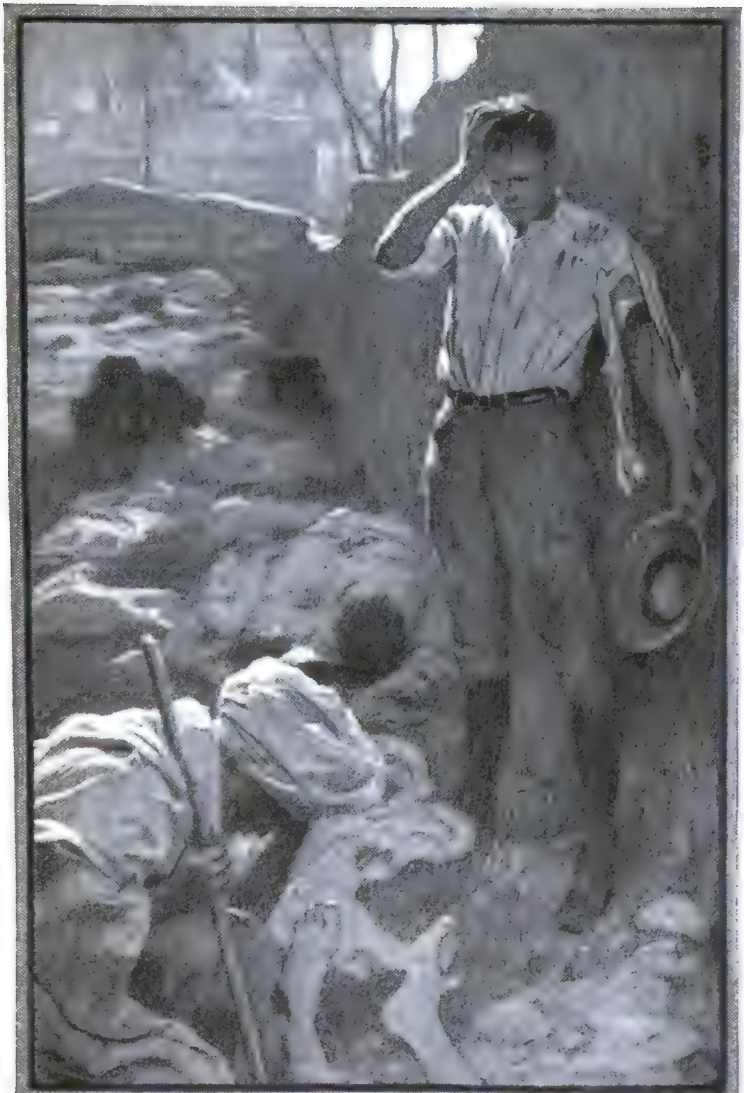

So this was why he had been standing in the dark with uncovered head, rubbing his hand over his brow—that her closeness might come through to him.

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of him the sepoys were running low, as if to escape. It made him think of ball-players leaving the field in the summer dusk after a game, running through the crowd to the club-house. The armored cars were backing out before him.

"Of course," he kept telling himself, "it had to come this way—end of the old story, the beginning of the story of the age."

Only natives were about him—ashen-lipped, muttering, frightened, dazed. He continued through the *kucha*, following the armored cars. He must get to the hotel. He had something to write, copy to file. But this delusion did not carry him far before its absurdity struck home. The outer world would never hear of this story until it leaked through by letter or word of mouth. The cables had been tight before. They would be drum-tight now.

VAGUELY and dully he realized that all things were changed for him for all time. Amritsar's public square—the massacre in the *maidan* had cloven him, and into the opening all India had rushed. The face of the hooked man came back to him—the English stare against the sinking city.

He had overtaken the nearest of the armored cars. He looked upon them strangely, their sleek integration. They had not been needed; India had died and been born again without them.

The driver of his carriage hailed him. Cobden lifted his hand in return, but halted. Suddenly he realized that he didn't want to go back to the Golden Temple Inn. The thing alive in him now was bigger than a story to be written, bigger than the finding of a free cable, which was not in India. He paid the driver and stemmed his way back against the people that thronged the lane.

"Sixteen hundred rounds in ten minutes," an English voice reiterated.

Cobden's head bowed under his helmet. He was slow to believe that the firing had lasted only ten minutes. It amazed him now that this was still a world of hot daylight. He looked back upon his coming through this lane as one does upon the last memory before a great sickness. He had to memorize and register again and again upon his faculties that he had alighted from his vehicle only fifteen minutes ago.

"God forgive me for losing my head," he muttered. For there was something in him that still counted losing one's head as the first moral offense. He was thinking of the moment standing before Fyatt.

As he reclimbed the mound where the sepoy firing line had stood, it came to him that a man might lose his head for a moment, at least, to find his heart.

He let himself down from the mound to the bloody ground. There he found presently a man wedged under the bodies of two who had died. He dragged this man loose, only to find that he was apparently bleeding to death from a shattered knee. He unwound a turban from one of the still figures near by and wrapped the wound, knotting it tightly above the flow of blood. His own left hand was impeded by the sling. Presently he freed it entirely, his personal scratches appearing ridiculous in this broad field of bloody men. Thus began his work. It was as if he had entered single-handed upon a task to alter the sewerage system of a city.

There were no English about, no police or native soldiers. Martial law had done its part and gone to supper. The people flocking into the *maidan* with moanings and horror-stricken cries now were those looking for their own. From the farthest parts of Amritsar they were drawn, from every house to which one or more did not report for the evening meal. Living men and women—hurrying, bending—hands reaching down, hands pressed to faces—the quick and the dead.

A while afterward he looked up to find that the sun had gone down. His knees were wet with blood. He felt the wet, spreading heat upon his left shoulder. His wound had opened from exertion—a smile at that.

Now he had extricated from the mass near the Hasali Gate the body of a trampled girl child. She was warm, possibly not dead. She smelled of the earth and tears. His heart thumped, and pity, like a warm breath, surged through him—pity, which some one said was the pain of love—oh, yes; that was Miss Claes. He touched the child's long, coarse black hair in the thick twilight.

His lips formed with explanations and thoughts as he worked—the things he would tell Pidge, and the way he would tell these things to Pidge. He placed the

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unconscious one down at the feet of a native doctor who was binding wounds, but often raising his eyes to heaven in prayer that the soldiers might not come back.

He stood up in the warm dark, lifted his helmet and mopped his forehead with his grimy right hand. He could actually smell what horses smelled—as he remembered in France and Arabia—when they snorted and ran aside. The dead would never end—hundreds of dead—the public square covered with dead. And what was pulling at his brain—something trying to gain admittance? He had it now. Pidge Musser was close again—close as she had come in the Ashrama—not weeping, horrified, not in the least dismayed or hopeless by all these lifeless ones on the ground, but the spirit of swift-handed helpfulness, utterly in accord with him in thought and purpose, no words being necessary. So this was why he had been standing in the dark with uncovered head, rubbing his hand over his brow—that her closeness might come through to him. Not so weird, after all, that he should know this, standing upon the soaked turf of the *maidan*. Things of this kind had often happened on the battlefields of France.

Was this what it was all about—the separation, the struggling—at last to become connected to her this way, though across the world? He continued separating the wounded, but every little while, when his hands were free, he would stop and uncover his head to the moist warmth of the evening. Would she come nearer and nearer through the years? And these were her dead and her dying, and she had blessed the little Hindu girl with coarse black hair.

Now it was full dark, and the cries of the living women across the *maidan* were raised in agony because they must leave the Bagh before the curfew sounded. Hundreds were still searching. They had not found their own, but it was close to eight o'clock, and this—the dead on the field—was what had come of breaking martial law to-day. It did not matter that lives might still be saved if the wounded could be taken out from the dead. Government had fired upon them to-day. Government would come with more death if they disobeyed— Husbands dragged away the women whose faces turned back.

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Richard Cobden stayed on. He had the sense of not being alone. Moreover, there was much to do. There were voices to answer. He heard cries and callings from the windows of the houses that overlooked the *maidan*. No English came that night—but the pariah dogs from all the city and outskirts. They moved like ghouls in the shadows. There were mysteries everywhere—white vapors from the ground. He saw and felt the unutterable, became rich for future years in that one night with the fruits of sadness.

COBDEN walked back from the *maidan* through the streets of Amritsar in the dawn. He did not feel like a foreigner. That which had happened during the night had furnished him with what rarely comes to a white man—the Indian point of view. He was in the Indian fabric for the moment at least, no longer a spectator from the West. As he approached the Golden Temple, near which was the inn, Nagar appeared in the street, and they walked together in silence. As he tottered a little, Nagar's arm swung round him, and Dicky said:

"Don't. I'm very dirty."

Now that the light was coming on, they saw people hurrying to the Jallianwalla Bagh.

In the room, Dicky said:

"Make a lot of tea, Nagar. Sorry you won't join me in a little drink from the flask." A moment later he said: "I think, after all, you'll have to help me get off this shirt. I'm a rubbed-in mess of blood and dirt."

Nagar perceived that the body of the American trembled full length, also that his clothing was soaked with blood from the wounded shoulder, as well as from stains received from handling others.

"Some of them crawled about in the dark," Cobden was saying. "A woman sat there moaning through the whole night. The dogs came—I heard them lapping, lapping. From the windows of the houses round the Bagh came the cries of the women who dared not disobey the curfew. Why, that ten minutes of firing was longer than whole years I lived as a schoolboy, but the ten hours since dark—that passed, Nagar, like a man walking by a house, not a lame man. I saw your India—oh, yes! The

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sweetest-tempered crowd I ever moved through, but something dangerous and deadly in its pain and grief. God help us—when you wake up."

Nagar helped him. Dicky bathed his neck and face and hair copiously with one hand and then washed the left arm. With Nagar's help the wound was packed with clean lint. Cobden drank hot tea, filling his goblet several times and shivering, though the heat of the night was still in the room. Finally he sat down in his bath-robe by the open window and lit a cigarette. The sun-light had found the gold of the temple dome.

"I actually forgot myself," Dicky repeated. "When an American forgets himself, Nagar, you can be sure a big show is being pulled off. I've smoked too much, talked too much. I am going to lie down for a little—until breakfast. Bed! Think of having a bed—in Amritsar! A bed with sheets. Out there so many were lying on the ground. Oh, I say, Nagar; where will they put them all?"

The Hindu's cool, slim fingers reached over and touched his hand. He didn't speak, just kept his hand still, and Dicky found it easier to stop talking because of that hand, easier to endure the furious forces of activity in his brain. Finally Nagar spoke.

"It was well for you to be there—to forget yourself there through the hours. It will come forth from you for years—not as the voice of an American but as a citizen of the world. You have prepared long; last night India found you prepared, and dared to show you something of herself. Miss Claes would be very glad to be here with us this morning.'"

Dicky realized that he had not only come closer into the Indian heart but into Nagar's as well.

"You might sleep a little until breakfast. I shall not leave you until after that. You are very tired and spent, but it will not hurt you. When a man forgets himself, as you say, he is strangely replenished."

But Dicky did not sleep. They breakfasted early, and Nagar rose, saying:

"In the days that you remain in Amritsar finishing your work—for last night will mean more and more to you as the days go on—we shall cheerfully forget that we are friends. I mean as men who seek to be together. What you will see you must watch without feeling or partizanship. One cannot tell—you may see strange things. But remember this: that anything which might happen to me must never shake your purpose to achieve a report—must never make you forget that you have a story to tell to America."

"I don't understand, Nagar."

"It is difficult to say. I can only repeat: anything that might happen to me in this city must not rouse in you a personal or partizan effort to help me. We must be strangers unless I seek you. The English are very angry. Remember, you are a reporter, and you are safest in the midst of your own people. You must have no feelings about me to betray you. Go further into the English. Forget me—until you reach New York once more."

"I'm beginning to see——"

Nagar was gone. As Dicky conned all this he began to wonder if he would see his friend again. All the days before this in Amristar he had been waiting for things to get quiet so that he and Nagar might really begin to get together.

"A story to tell," he muttered, as he fell asleep.

IN THE days that followed Richard Cobden worked quietly, and from the standpoint of the English almost entirely. He "exposed" himself like a film to the aftermath of the tragedy. He had been in a psychic whirl on the night in the *maidan*. All that had to cool down and clear. Now he went after facts and statements. It was never to be ascertained—the number of killed and injured. The English granted three hundred dead; the natives claimed five times that, even more. He was much at headquarters, and confined himself practically altogether to the civil lines. Through Lala Relu Ram he received certain reports from the native point of view and guarded these little tissues assiduously. A cigarette-case contained them all.

Less and less through the later days of April was Nagar to be seen, though occasional messages reached the American from him through the students. One of these was a suggestion, which Dicky followed, to send off whatever mail he had ready in care of one of the young men, who was secretly leaving for French India.

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Dicky understood the English situation better and better as days went on. Here were a handful of white people away up in the Punjab in the midst of native millions. Of their right to rule these millions there was not one doubt in the English soul. One had to realize this before there was the faintest chance of comprehending. The native element had shown signs of violence. Of all times under the sun this was the time of the British government to answer the native restlessness with *force!* There was no foreigner in the public life of Amritsar who doubted the thing now to do—hence the floggings, salaamings and crawlings of the people in the days that followed the massacre.

One day toward the end of April the American was making his way through the civil lines when he came to a tennis-court. No set of doubles or singles was in progress. This was a game of triangle—a *tikiti* in the center of the court—a naked native strung up and being whipped. Dicky had seen about enough of this and was ready to turn back when something of the carriage of the native's head arrested his eye and started a peculiar sinking in his heart.

The bare back was toward Cobden, but the face turned sidewise revealed the profile of Nagar. His hands were strapped high toward the top of the great frame formed in the shape of the letter A. Nagar had been stripped to the loin-cloth, his head bare, his white robes and turban-cloth flung upon the turf. The stripes were being put on by one of the native police. The whip was a rigid canelike affair, but longer than a walking-stick. A detachment of native soldiers was drawn up on one side, police on the other. The young officers of the military, one of whom Dicky knew, were in charge of the affair.

Cobden had halted, hand to mouth. Each stroke blinded his eyes; his body became for an instant after it like a house in flames with every curtain tightly drawn. Then he would see the sunlight before the next stroke, and the naked man with bleeding back. He had a direct need to turn his back upon this thing—the old nausea. It never occurred to him that this was his own great test, greater than Nagar's, for such tests of the human heart do not come announced; but out of all past experience one thing stood in the midst of a rocking universe: that if he did anything in this red blindness he would do worse than nothing.

He walked away, his elbows jerking up as another stroke fell. The thing that saved him was already accomplished. The turning of his back was all that was required, apparently, since in this instant he got a life-and-death grip on the word "reporter." Was he Nagar's friend or a man with a story to tell?

Then he knew just one furious, smearing doubt. What of human loyalty—to stand by and allow this thing to go on?

He walked round to meet Nagar face to face. Ten feet away he stood until Nagar's eyes came up to his. Had Nagar's hand been free to lift and command silence, his lips free to speak, the word could not have been more fiercely impressed. Indeed, the word "silence" seemed to have been shot into the American's consciousness.

A blow fell. Nagar's eyes closed; his lips stretched out as if struck by an invisible hand. Then, under the trailing eyelids, Dicky saw a look of inexpressible gratitude and relief—the barest beginning of a smile. Nagar had found him fit to trust. It was another moment of real life, that moment of the look, another instant of essential recognition.

"OH, I say, Cobden—have you seen a ghost?"

It was Langoyer, one of the young English officers, who spoke. He was leaning upon his cane to flick a cigarette-stub off the court with his boot. Langoyer paid no attention to the flogging. The men attended to that, you know. One had to stand by—as one would wait for his horse to drink.

"How many does this man get?" Cobden asked.

"Thirty."

"What for?"

"He knows more of the sedition of Kitchlew and Satyapal than he'll tell."

The figure had gone limp on the triangle.

"Fainted," said one of the officers.

The whipping stopped. A tin bucket of water was brought and dashed upon Nagar's face and shoulders. A moan came from him because he was not yet quite conscious. Then the knees drew up and his feet felt for the ground.

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Langoyer stepped forward, taking Nagar's ear in his right hand and calling aloud,

"Will you tell the truth now of Kitchlew's plot against the government?"

Nagar looked at him without hatred. He tried to speak twice before the words came:

"I have already told the truth."

"How many stripes have been given?" Langoyer asked.

"Twenty-six."

"Finish the thirty; then take him to *kotwali*. A few days more will make him all right."

The American remained. One—two—three—four.

The hands were unstrapped. The robe was cast about the shoulders. Nagar could stand. Dicky left the officers and followed his friend and the native policemen to the station, feeling like a pariah's whelp.

IN CHOOSING that serial for the *Public Square* Pidge had met with much difficulty. The choice had narrowed down finally to two manuscripts. One was by a maker of the "new" American literature named Carver, insistently material, a thing of drabs and tans and grays, but earnest, even in its hopelessness. It steadily portrayed a cross-section of life, and really was a fine piece of human observation but altogether unlit with intuition.

The other book was a novel of New York, by a woman whose name was entirely unheard of. This manuscript had been refused several times as a serial in the past year, and several times as a book-prospect. The letters of refusal from the different editors were also on Pidge Musser's desk. The united opinion of all readers was that this unknown woman's story was unquestionably an augur for her future as a novelist rather than a compelling announcement of her arrival.

In her own heart Pidge believed that the woman's story would interest more readers than the man's, also that the *Public Square* would be saved a matter of two thousand dollars in taking the woman's story, for Carver stood out for a high price for his first American serial rights.

"It isn't the freedom of ignorance," she said at last about the lower-priced book, "but it isn't the freedom of knowledge, either. No; I can't take the chance."

So the novel by the unknown woman went back to Harrow Street with its refusals, and found a resting-place in the drawer under the mirror that waved; and only Miss Claes and the author herself knew who was hurt.

Late in May there was a big letter from Richard Cobden, posted at Bombay in early April. Though it was written to her personally, Pidge saw in it Dicky's first real work, his first actual grasp and retention of essentials. She read the letter through twice on the day it arrived, and that night took it home to read to Miss Claes.

I have been with Gandhi several times in the past three days, and to-morrow I start north for Amritsar to join Nagar. I feel like an unadulterated American to-night. In the last three days with Gandhi I have come to understand you as never before—and America and the American soldier. I have found out, Pidge, what you mean by stating and living the fact that it isn't how much we know that counts but how much we do. Gandhi is a doer; his genius doesn't dream. *It does.* The sun shines on all India, but Gandhi has become a lens. The rays focalize through him. The ground burns under his feet. He is called a bigot, a fanatic, a living blue-law, and it is all true, Pidge. He is drawn in black and white. He has no half-tones, no twilights, no afterglows. He is devoid of atmosphere as the moon. His lines of light and shadow are never blended or diffused. He is vivid noon where his light strikes, densest night where light ends. Oh, yes; he is pure. I have not heard less than that from any of his enemies. He has made me see that a woman who "falls for" a man can never become the man-maker which a wife must be. Queer how it came to me that way first, before I saw the man's side of it—the great thing you have done, pushing me back, forever pushing me back into myself until that day when I shall be able to "stand," not "fall for" you.

I am learning so slowly what I bargained for that night at the Punjabi Fireplace. "Go back into your house!" Gandhi cries to India. (Not his words, you know; merely my picture of him.) "Fast and pray. That is safe. Fast and pray and spin. Pray to the hum of the *charka*. Forget the West now! Find yourself, and you will know better how to deal with the West—when he comes to your doors again."

The two women talked low after reading, because of one asleep in the room. He was not to be disturbed. They stood over him now. He would not have approved at all of their gaiety and know-it-all manner had he been awake. His lids were down; the black, curving lashes reposed in their hollows; the world, which was the big horse he must sometime ride, was away, minding its own business.

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The curb and door-step thronged with memories. "Oh, Dicky, it's too much—too much," she whispered at last. "Please come soon and prop me up."

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"Pidge," Miss Claes said, after a long pause, "this little slate of Harrow Street is all written over. It is to be rubbed out now. My part is finished here—I don't know how well, but it is finished. I am leaving New York."

"Why, that—that seems insupportable! Why, Miss Claes—I thought anything could happen but that—to my New York!"

"Only you are to know, dear," Miss Claes said moments afterward. "Yes; it is India——"

"To Nagar—you are to be with him—the Hills?"

"Don't, Pidge! It isn't for *words*——"

"Forgive me——"

"There are terrible days for India. It means work—work—tests for every one's courage. Little Harrow Street is still and steady, compared— But this is dear to me—the thought that I go ahead to make ready for you another place to come——"

"My upper room," said Pidge softly. "My upper room!"

MR. ADOLPH MUSSER, with his many callers, could not live in two small upper back rooms in the Village, especially since an adopted male child of one year was rooted and ramifying on the site. One of the ramifications was a female lodger and one-time nurse who looked after the child while Pidge was away at the office. Mr. Musser, during his first week in New York, before he found an apartment in the Sixties, had also pronounced this woman too heavy-footed to live with.

Though Pidge had received an important increase of salary, dating from the first of this year, she did not find herself in a greatly improved condition when the additional expenses of nurse and her father's separate maintenance were considered. However, something happened which she had not foreseen. Mr. Adolph Musser became rapidly self-supporting. According to his predictions, New York proved to be suffering from a "biological hunger and thirst" for his very sort of metaphysic. Los Angeles had been sated. One had merely to move from temple to temple in Los Angeles. Cultists of all colors were there—light-bringers from all lands. Mr. Musser, according to predictions, found New York a virgin oil-field, and he was not long in getting his derricks up.

In early July Pidge made her first move since coming to New York. The spirit had gone out of the house in Harrow Street for her with Miss Claes's departure. She sent Fanny's baby up into the country and took a room at the Sennacherib in Gramercy Park, a step of which Rufe Melton strongly approved.

"You were getting stale down there, Pidge," he said one night when he came to dine. "The Village is all right for a novelty, but real New York hasn't time for that sort of thing. I see you're running Carver's novel in the *P. S.* What did you get in on that for? Did he give it to you?"

"Rather not. It cost real money."

"A hang-over from John Higgins' desk?"

"No; we took it after—after——"

"Carver could never have slipped that over on you," he broke in, "if you had lived up-town. But, no; you never would listen to me—that a thing isn't great because it's squalid——"

"You think it isn't a successful serial?"

"Not a chance——"

There was certain truth in what he said. Rufe confided that he was doing a long story.

"What's it on?" she asked.

"Business," said Rufe. "Shipping—grain — iron — packing-houses. Everybody's panting for business since the war."

"Sounds American."

"Epic of the Great Lakes, Pidge. Never knew what I was about till now——"

She was thinking of Amritsar—of the first Amritsar mail recently in from Richard Cobden, posted at Pondicherry, French India—British bulletins, native documents and Dicky's own straight story of April tenth and thirteenth. It had been difficult for Pidge not to become too excited by all this.

For the first time Dicky's work had carried her off her feet. That had been days ago, and she had not altogether trusted her first fierce enthusiasms, but they didn't subside, and at the present minute Rufe's epic of the Great Lakes sounded to her like a forlorn side-show. Moreover, Dicky's Amritsar story, about to be printed in the *Public Square*, took away most of the disappointment in that Carver's novel hadn't proved a powerful stimulus to circulation.

"Its capital is Chicago," Rufe further

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divulged about his book. "Funny how you have to get away from there to see that big town! All the years I lived in Chi—never got next to her as I have since I came to New York. Yes; it's booming along. Haven't been really right until just now since I was gassed."

"I'm glad, Rufe."

"It's got a mahatma in it," Rufe chuckled.

"A what?"

"What's the matter with you, Pidge?"

"That word—from you!"

"You look as if you'd seen the Dweller——"

"The what, Rufe?"

He chuckled again.

"Didn't know I've been going in for the occult, did you? Say, Pidge; there's one fine thing about you: I never feel as if you could be disappointed in your Rufie."

"Why is that?" She was entirely off his trend.

"You haven't started yet to expect anything of me. Oh, yes; had to have a mahatma in the story. It's the new thing. Everybody's got one since the war. Not enough to go round. This mahatma of mine in Chi is wise to the stock exchange. It's his tip, you know, that the whole tale turns on. Reader never thinks of it—until it's pulled."

"Where did you get your model?"

He laughed again.

"Right in the family, Pidge. Been going to hear Adolphus. Say—you never did appreciate your father. Bad habit of yours, Pidge—honest to God—to lose respect for a man just because you live with him."

Pidge was in a whirl. Her hands dropped down to the seat of her chair on either side and gripped hard. The world looked about as big to her as Delaware, and Amritsar and New York connected by railway.

"Heard him this afternoon—in the ballroom of the Pershing—swell crowd out," Rufe pursued. "Talked on Lytton's 'Zanoni.' I'm going to read that book. And didn't Adolph put it over to the damsels and dowagers! Just what I need for my white mahatma. Where does he get all that? It's a wonder you haven't gotten in on the old man's stuff, Pidge."

She wanted Miss Claes as never before. This was too much for one small person to hold. When she really listened again, Rufe was asking to go up-stairs with her to see her room.

"It's just a common room. What's the use?"

"Little afraid to see me alone, eh, Pidge?"

"Not afraid—only, what's the use?"

"You might see it different."

"I might have, once, Rufe——"

"Say, Pidge——"

"Yes?"

"Does Mrs. Melton want to be free?"

Her hands dropped to the seat of her chair again. She saw the new want in his eyes and something else—the old captive thing.

There were two possible answers to his question, and it took every minute of her twenty-five years and all that had gone before to choose. This is what she said:

"Mrs. Melton will never be free."

"What—what do you mean?"

"Ask your mahatma, Rufe."

PIDGE felt the hugeness of life round her at last. Doors were being opened as never before. She saw as clearly as if Rufe Melton had confessed to her that it was *he* who wanted to be free. She could grant this well enough, having been forced to it, in effect, from the beginning. He would doubtless come again soon, making it plain that he wanted her to agree to divorce. The point was that certain barriers and limitations in her own life were suddenly lifted. It was as if she had emerged from a city to the shore of the sea, and before her eyes was an unbroken horizon-line.

The abrupt extension frightened her. The story of Amritsar now unfolding for her from the Indian mail—in its hatelessness, in its devotion to truth and unsentimental love for the people—unveiled for her eyes a *man*—not Gandhi, not Nagar, but Richard Cobden himself. The few sentences he had inserted in his letter about Gandhi: "The great thing you have done, pushing me back, forever pushing me back into myself until the day when I shall be able to 'stand,' not 'fall for' you"—in these words there was for Pidge an invincible call.

She had searched the language for another expression to convey what that little slangy verb "to fall for" meant. It was one

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of her treasures. When one "fell for" a person or thing—one couldn't "stand" for the same. One was captive, not a coworker. Here was the difference between infatuation and romance. Dicky had found this out. There was expressed in his words more than she had dreamed as possible; and this time words thrilled her furiously, because she believed they had become working knowledge before it had occurred to him to express the idea. She saw this knowledge working out in his studies of Gandhi. He did not "fall for" the Little Man. In a word, he "stood" for him. But now that Dicky was ready to stand for her, she was ready to fall, and all her horizons were being pushed back to give her room.

She was very weary. She had not known it before. The *Public Square* thrived. It was strong-pulsed with new life. For the first time in her experience she sensed from the magazine's field, following the issue of the first Amritsar story, silence, the perfect tribute, the instantaneous readjustment of all other journals; then crowded mails, the answer from people everywhere. Something about Gandhi touched hundreds of people to the point of saying so in letters to the *Public Square*.

Yes; she was weary. She had held grimly to the post. She wanted to turn it over to Dicky Cobden now. It had been like this once before—on the night of Somebody's shoulder. She had wanted to give him what he wanted that night—the tiredest and most hopeless girl in New York. Only, that night it had been—for what he had. Now it was for what he was.

John Higgins lost his bearings in the city traffic. A copy of the issue containing the first section of the Amritsar story was in the old editor's hand when he fell in the street. Pidge was with him for several hours until the end. The old man looked at her long and strangely—the eyes more "run out" than ever. He did not seem to hear her words, but if she remained in silence too long a little frown gathered on his forehead and his hand would pull at hers. He had waited for the Big Story. Once he said, "I wish Dicky would come," and that brought Pidge's slow tears.

The next day a solicitor called at the office, and Pidge still felt squally. She didn't get at what he was saying. She thought it had something to do with a secret society that was going to attend an absurd matter known as "obsequies." She was deluged in words.

"Be perfectly calm, Mrs. Melton," the solicitor said at last. "This isn't exactly bad news; but I've known lasting injury from one as well as the other——"

"Please—what are you talking about?"

"Your legacy—from the late John Higgins——"

"But it was only last night," she observed.

"The late John Higgins, nevertheless. The demise——"

"And what about it?"

"That he has left you—this being the memoranda—his interest in the *Public Square*."

"Me?"

"A half-interest in the ownership, to be exact."

Pidge glanced round the room. The man was sitting. The first and terrible obstacle of life was to remove him—or escape from him.

"What have I to do?"

"Just sign——"

But he was still sitting after she had signed. He wanted to be social.

She was on the car going home. She hopped off at Eighth Street and had turned into Harrow before she realized that she didn't live there any more. Curving Harrow Street was quiet and calling. She went into the curve and stood before the old green front. A sign on the door announced:

ROOMS, PERMANENT AND TRANSIENT.

"What kind of rooms are transient rooms?" she thought. The curb and doorstep thronged with memories. "Oh, Dicky, it's too much—too much," she whispered at last. "Please come soon and prop me up."

DICKY did not see Nagar again in Amritsar, but up to mid-May the students reported that his friend was still imprisoned. The sound of those falling strokes were slow to die out of the corridors of the American's memory. They woke him in the night. It was far easier, however, to recall the splendor of gameness in the way Nagar had taken his beating.

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This satisfied every American instinct; and even above this was the mystery of compassion for the English in Nagar's face. Here was a man on a tennis-court in a remote Punjabi town, hardly heard of in this war-racked world, plainly putting over the thing he had marveled at as a small boy in Sunday-school: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* Apparently the same majestic composure. Life held many things; yet Richard Cobden couldn't be sure altogether that he had not outraged the spirit of friendship in failing to register his protest of word and deed. Of course, the consequences might have been disastrous, but, at least, a certain man-to-man loyalty would have been satisfied.

THE Amritsar story was no longer on the outside; it was in Richard Cobden's brain and heart. He wrote some of it and his letters were forwarded, but still he conned and brooded. Having held still through the whipping of Nagar, he found it easier to stand in the midst of following events without losing his head or letting emotion or opinion have right of way.

Late in May a student brought word that Nagar was free and had gone south. This was all that Cobden had been waiting for. Crawling, salaaming, flogging, imprisonment and forced testimony had long since become to him a full and bitter cup. At the station, as he waited for his train, a student, edging near, managed to whisper two words:

"Ashrama. Ahmadabad."

The American's head bowed slightly. He was not met at the station in Ahmadabad, but a servant at the Entresden told him to go at once to the Ashrama. There were inner and inner rooms in that house. Dicky found himself listening for the voice of Mahatma-ji as he entered, and his eyes searching the shadows of the hall for Nagar, a kind of breathless pain about it all. As a door opened at last and the native who conducted him drew back, Cobden saw a woman standing in the dimness. Her face, turned toward him, was a mere blur of darkness, but there was a leap toward it in Richard Cobden's breast. Then he was standing before her in a daze of joy, one hand in hers and one upon her shoulder.

"It happened very quickly in New York," she told him. "A letter from Pidge, saying that I was coming, could hardly have reached you before the steamer that brought me——"

"But, Miss Claes—New York! What are we to do? No Harrow Street!"

"You will know what to do," she said. "And about the things that were in your rooms. I had them carefully boxed and sent to your mother, who was well when I left—also your aunt and sister."

He took from his pocket the old dark key to the "parlor" door. She bent and touched it.

"Keep it, Richard," she said, "until I send you another."

"And Nagar—" he began at length.

"He is here."

"And well? I could get so little word."

"Nagar has been hurt, but is healing. Look!"

Dicky turned to find his friend standing behind them at the door. He had felt a presence there, but thought it was the one who had brought him. Nagar's eyes looked very large in the wasted face.

"Oh, yes; all is well with me," he said. "I have been sorry to leave you so much alone in the North. "Yes," he added; "it was harder for you than for me—the test that day on the tennis-court. You were brave, my friend. I knew all was well—when the instant passed and you remained silent."

"How do you mean—all was well?"

"I knew that the story of Amritsar would get to America, since you did not spoil it by defending me." Nagar turned to Miss Claes. "I saw the fury and fright rise in his eyes, and all the impulses of ethics of the West—then silence over all. It was as if we were cemented."

Dicky remembered that last word afterward.

As he moved about and talked he was vaguely conscious of watching Nagar and the woman together. It was as if Pidge would want to hear of every gesture and detail. Miss Claes was less Indian here than in Harrow Street. There he had thought of her as belonging to the East; here she seemed of the West.

Something of the composure he had noted on the tennis-court had come to stay in Nagar's eyes. As moments passed Dicky knew that they contained deep vitalities of meaning that would appear in coming days.

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It was as if his limitations were being stretched, but by consummate hands. There was repeatedly brought to him from them—something that he refused to hear or dwell with: that he had done well, that he was deeply approved of in their sight, that there was much more to take place between them, even though they were to stay in Asia and he was leaving for the States. Then all faces turned, and in the doorway stood the Little Man.

No one spoke. Mahatma-ji came in between the three, and Dicky felt the old urge somehow to help with his hands—the sense, too, of all India thronging, whispering round them. For a moment the four had been standing in silence, when they heard the sweep of bare, slow feet in the hall, and now an old dark face was in the doorway, a smile serene as nothing else on earth but the Hills themselves—a dark, wrinkled old face, and she came forward and stood very low and little in the midst of them—Gandhi's comrade.

IN SAN FRANCISCO, waiting for the departure of his train east, a card was sent up to Cobden's hotel room. It was from Chris Heidt, the managing editor of his former newspaper connection.

"Hello, Cobden! Just noticed you were off ship. What did you bring back?"

Dicky reflected.

"The story of Amritsar," he said finally.

"Amritsar? What's that?"

"The first big story I ever ran across. I feel like one of Job's servants, who said he alone remained to make a report."

Mr. Heidt had been much on trains during the past few days and had missed the fact, so far, that the *Public Square* had begun to publish the story.

"Not going to bury it in a weekly, are you?"

"I have much more than the *Public Square* could use in months. It really should get out into the broad market. The end of one world and the birth of another took place that Sunday in Amritsar—all in miniature, you understand——"

He spoke of Gandhi and touched upon the story of Amritsar.

"Sure!" said Mr. Heidt. "Sure it's a big yarn, but months ago. No way to substantiate it. You're a little out of perspective, Cobden, seeing it all first-hand."

"I can substantiate it," said Dicky queerly.

"I know; but the whole story's a trouble-maker. As far as I can make out, this Gandhi is a sort of sanctimonious Lenin, and we're not promoting any kind of Lenins just now. Red roughhouses all over the world, but we're not advertising the fact. The best newspaper interests here and in England are letting that sort of thing die down. Everybody's healthily intent on getting back to business right now. Make a corking fiction-setting—your Amritsar—series of short stories that would do no harm."

Thus Richard had his American perspective restored.

Dicky was considerably subdued. India had permitted his ideas to romp at large. He had forgotten that, home again, these ideas must be brought down to an orderly trudge. America, as a whole, seemed one-pointedly trying to get back to work after the war, calling all protestors "untimely" and "in bad taste." Dicky thought out the situation minutely and severely during the three full travel-days to Chicago. At the end of each he was somewhat exhausted from the big bonfires that had taken place within him—piles of rubbish, glamour and the like.

In Chicago he procured two numbers of the *Public Square* preceding the current issue, and before his eyes was the manner in which Pidge had "sprung" the Amritsar story. He felt the magic of her working with him in an altogether new way. The latest number confessed, not without grace, that the story of Gandhi and Amritsar had roused the more open-minded element of the American public as nothing else since the war.

But, thanks to Chris Heidt, the returning correspondent watched the rising tide of public interest in his work as a spectator unexpectant instead of a performer who fancies he has the world by the tail. It dawned on him, however, that Chris Heidt hadn't known quite all that was going on in America under the homely thunders of trade.

He reached New York in the early evening and went to Fiftieth Street at once. There he had dinner and an hour of talk before he rang up Mrs. Melton at the Sennacherib.

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"Is this Mr. Cobden?" a voice asked presently.

"Yes."

"Mrs. Melton left word for you to go to Fifty-four Harrow Street—to the parlor on the second floor, the card says."

DICKY didn't take out his own car that night. Perhaps he didn't feel as if he could keep his mind on getting himself down-town. He sat back in the cushions of his mother's limousine, and Conrad, whose career as Cobden coachman had changed to Cobden chauffeur nearly twenty years ago, handled the big box like a hearse. "Sit tight, Dicky," he breathed, and never once urged Conrad forward. In fact, he didn't speak until it became necessary to show the way a little, for Harrow Street is tricky to find from Washington Square.

"Don't wait—yes; you'd better wait, Conrad," he called, crossing the walk to the door.

The outer door was unlatched. He hurried up one flight. The same curtain, the white light.

"Pidge!"

She came forth from the inner room. She halted a few feet from him, and he saw her searching, imploring look. His shoulders straightened; his hands dropped to his side. The finer elements of his understanding sensed the great need of a woman, which he could not hope immediately to register in thought. To answer her need in action, however, was instantly more dominant within him than his thirst for herself.

She came a step nearer. Light was filling her eyes—the shining of an almost incredible hope.

"Oh, Dicky, you can! I believe you can!"

"Yes?"

She was nearer.

"And I can come and rest—a little?"

"Yes, Pidge——"

"I'm so tired, you know."

She had come to him under the light.

"And, oh, since I knew you were coming, everything has been different. I haven't been *me* at all. I've never played—and now everything—all work—is silly, unimportant. Dicky, everything seems to be done!"

"I'm on the job, Pidge. You can play——"

"Until I find myself—you—you will stand for two?"

"Yes, Pidge."

"All my things, your things, Dicky—so I can rush away and breathe?"

"That's what I'm here for."

"Rufe Melton and my father and the desk—all yours?"

"And the baby, too, Pidge."

"Dicky—Dicky—don't dare to look! I'm going to cry! Since your telegram from San Francisco, it seemed I could hardly stay alive. Oh, it's so good to rest!"

"And not a hurry in the world!"

"Everything seemed done—and no place for me! Rufe and a rich girl up-town—oh, they're in full blossom, and he wants to be free. My father caught on in New York—no need now for me. The *Public Square* on the highroad at last; your Amritsar story capturing the whole field; nothing to do but to feed the presses more and more. Miss Claes gone, and the legacy—oh, Dicky, I saw your hand back of that! I couldn't miss it. It touched me—touched me——"

"It was his idea first, Pidge. All I had to do was to help him carry it out."

"All happened at once—all the strains lifted—no one depending—no one needing me! I've been dying to be a woman just once. I've never dared—never had time. It's so terrible to feel like a woman and not be able——"

"Why not now, Pidge?"

"We must work together first. We must clear our heads with a lot of work, and then will know how to play. Don't think, Dicky! I'm just resting a little. Fanny Gallup did that for me, and Rufe Melton is as much a baby as the other. He'll always need—us!"

"Pidge, listen! I couldn't stand any more than that now. To have you say that *'us!'* To have the work with you—to have earned that—to have your faith; that you dare come this close—to set you free—to have the years—years to make the big moments we have known apart come true together—I couldn't stand more—that's the fact of it—quite! Not now, I mean."

She stepped back from him, looking strangely into his face again.

"Dicky!"

"Yes?"

"The boy has come back to your face—

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that you lost in Africa—but a new and lasting boy—so much bigger and greater than that other time under the light."

He laughed and looked round the room. It was furnished, but barely, the "parlor" having reverted to a sleeping-room.

"But how did it happen—that we should come here, Pidge?"

"I couldn't let you come to Gramercy Park. I remembered that you waited to see me here after Africa, not at the office. I came down this way—the afternoon of the legacy and saw the sign: 'Rooms, Permanent and Transient.' I'm better now. We must have been here hours——"

He thought of Conrad, whom he had told to wait. She was saying:

"This room's all paid. I mean, we don't have to stop to speak to anybody—only walk out."

Their eyes held.

"Dicky!"

"Yes?"

"Let's go—now."

"I'm—I'm ready."

He waited for her to reach the hall curtains before he turned off the light. In the dimness of the hall she whispered,

"Fanny's room was back—at the far-end on this floor——"

"I remember once, Pidge, I went up the next flight and knocked at the door of your little back room."

"That's gone now," she answered.

"Gone?"

"My two books that were written there—and all the rest. I can tell you everything now—and of the book that is still to be written—our story, Dicky."

"A continued story," he said.

They went down into the street, into the car.

THE END

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June *EVERYBODY'S*—out May 15th

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Pink

The Explosion That Followed a Young Man's Sudden Declaration of Independence

By Charles Guernon

"I SAY, Freddy, old son, d'you know that every silly son of Satan eats three—three, mind—three full and complete meals every single day of his sinful life? And that's taking no sort of account of beer and tea and what-not."

"Incredible!" Freddy said, without looking up from the menu-card he was studying.

"See my point?" Pink went on earnestly. "Every single mortal man, woman and child in this beany old sphere. Three confounded meals every day—or——"

"I say, Pink; you haven't gone in for slummin' and all that sort of rotten-egg collectin', have you?" Freddy asked, looking up anxiously.

"What's a meal cost? Tell me that if you've brains enough," Pink said, ignoring Freddy's question.

"Dunno. Never gave it a thought. What do you want to know, exactly?"

"What I mean is this: Here you and I, Freddy—not to mention all the other rotters that come in here day in, day out—eat all we can stuff inside our Little Marys, not to mention all the Scotch and soda and all that sort of side issues—and you can't tell me what a dinner costs. Now, I ask you!"

"I say, Pink; do you mind if Firky brings me a mouthful or thereabouts of sea-fish of some drivellin' sort or other, and some of that side issue you inadvertently or what-not mentioned a moment ago? I'm here to regale the inner man, old bean, d'y'see?"

Pink waved a magnanimous hand.

"Now, look here—" he began again. But Freddy raised a protesting eyebrow.

"Shut up, Pinky; there's a good feller! That socialist rot takes my appetite, you know. What about Ascot? Got anything on——"

"Ascot be blowed, old son! And, besides, I'm not talking socialism."

Freddy shook his head.

"Sounds precious like it to me, Pinky. And what's puzzlin' me is—you look a bit—well, that way inclined."

"Dare say. But the point is: I've just ten bob in the blighty old world."

"Is it a riddle, Pink? You know well enough I couldn't come off a riddle in a generation. I'm your banker for whatever amount——"

Pink smiled mearily.

"The point is: I've left home and poppa, as the jolly American heiresses say it, with ten bob— Ah, here's Firks!"

When the sea-fish and side issues were properly arranged and Freddy's mouth occupied, Pink beckoned Firkins.

"How long could a man live on ten bob, Firks?"

"Well, sir, I've maintained life in my body, such as it is——"

"Such as what is?"

"My body, I meant, sir; but you may take it I meant life, too, sir. For I can't say it seemed worth much at the precise time I was about to narrate of——"

"I say!" Freddy murmured.

"Look here, Firks; I must see you about this," Pink said seriously. "Where do you live?"

Firkins took a card from his pocket and wrote on it.

"There, sir," he said, putting the card on the table. "I shall be at 'ome any time after six or thereabouts, m'lord."

Pink took the card, studied it a moment,

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nodded thanks, rose and, without a word to Mr. Cortlish, left the room.

"Shades of Bedlam!" Freddy muttered, staring after him.

"'Is father, the earl, was in this mornin', sir. 'E was talkin' to Sir Whilough Fountleroy, sir. I served 'em, you see, sir. And as I make it out, Lord Arthur's been indiscreet, as you might say, sir. They've 'ad a bit of a row, him and 'is lordship, sir."

"What's that to do with ten bob and all that rot?" Freddy asked.

"Sh, sir. There's the earl now, sir," Firkins whispered, and stepped away from the table.

PINK put his hat on his head, tapped it down to his ears, took his stick from the man, shook his shoulders, gave a wag to his head and stepped out of the club door.

"There!" he murmured, as he crossed over. "Last time you eat sea-fish or what-not in that silly-ass feeding-grounds till you've earned the price of a——"

He stopped abruptly, took off his hat, smiled genially and held out his hand to a young woman who had tapped his arm with a parasol. She was leaning from a smart two-seater and smiling abstractedly.

"Jump in, Pink," she said pleasantly. "Bobby's gone somewhere in Piccadilly—left me in this blazing sun. Brothers have no manners. Let's have a run into the country—tea at thingamy and all?"

"I say—but what about Bobby? He'll be hysterical, you know."

"Teach him manners."

Pink stepped over the side and started the car. Outside Stoneham he suddenly put on the brake.

"I say, Pam, do you realize that every miserable son of woman in this United Kingdom eats three—three, mind—three full and hearty meals every single day of their lives?"

"Really?"

"And that's taking no sort of account of beer and tea and—and what-not, you know. Incredible, eh? One simply can't pretend to take it in, can one?"

"I believe I'd find it easier after I've had some tea at the inn, by thingamy, Pink."

"Of course! Silly of me to put it to you on an empty—er—you know."

At the inn they selected a table in the corner of the garden. They sat down, and while Pink told the host what to bring, Pam hummed a tune. When the man had gone, she said,

"Well, Pink, old dear?"

"Can't make it out, really, you know," he said, wrinkling his brows. "Just fancy millions—billions of men, women and children—every mother's son of 'em—But, I say—you haven't had your tea."

He fell silent and nothing more was said by either until Pam had swallowed the last crumb and was abstractedly licking the jam-spoon. Then Pink took out his ten bob.

"See that? That's every pound, shilling and pence I've got in this silly old terraqueous globe we call the earth, old girl."

Pam pushed her purse toward him.

"They know you here, Pink?"

"I don't mean anything of that sort, 'O woman shapely as the swan!'" He laughed. "I mean—anywhere!"

She took the cigarette he offered.

"Tell me the whole story, Pink. And mind you don't expurgate."

"I say, Pam; you're an understanding sort of person, you know."

"Begin." She nodded.

"Row with the pater. Oh, a *row!* Left the ancestral halls and all that sort of thing, you see. On my own. Ten bob. Three beastly meals—twenty-four hours, w. p. or not, do you see? Not to mention side issues and what-not, like, say, flat, clubs and one or two other insignificant items amounting to somewhere about four figures to the left, as you look at 'em, of the silly little dot."

"Go on," she said, watching the blue spiral from her cigarette writhe and twist like some living thing in mortal agony—or, more likely, it suggested to her imagination a ghostly, demoniac dance of love.

Pink spun his cigarette at the dozing cat some three yards or so away.

"Said I shouldn't marry whom I dashed well pleased!"

Pam leaned down and blew a fleck of cigarette ash from the cloth, then looked at him and smiled from under her Leghorn hat.

"Said," Pink went on, grinning at the recollection, "that one—er, thingamy—what d'y'call 'em, was all he'd tolerate in the family. Gave poor old Rossy a bad character—my word! Said he'd see me damned before he'd see me marry—a—er—

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well, creature, say—like Jimmy let hook him, by heaven!" Pink laughed reminiscently. "I say; she's not a bad sort, you know."

"Who?"

"Why, my sister-in-law, Rossy, of course."

"Oh!"

"Said I'd marry *his* choice for me, or by all his silly old ancestors—and mine, too, of course, if you look at it that way—back to Adam and before, and all that sort of rot, you know, I'd find myself begging my bread from door to door—'back doors,' he said—the old blighter!"

Pam laughed a slow, quiet laugh.

"And you said——"

"I said I'd marry any—er—that is, I mean to say, I insisted I'd choose my own wife—do you see?—and ask nobody's permish." He stopped and frowned at the top of the Leghorn, which was, for the moment, turned his way. "I say," he went on; "the pater thinks me still in the cradle, you know. Be forbidding me Scotch and soda one of these days—ask me to go back to the nursery-bottle, by Jove!"

"What did he say to your declaration of independence?" she asked, scrubbing her cigarette into her cup to extinguish it.

"Said nasty—oh, rather!—nasty things about—er—a certain girl, do you see?"

"Really? And you?"

"Well, I naturally refused to listen, you know. Naturally—eh?"

"Yes; naturally."

"Told him another word about her and I'd kiss the whole kit good-by. Shake the silly old dust of his proud acres from the soles of my varnished boots, as it were."

"Then?"

"Then—he offered me the hospitality of the wide, wide world, do you see?"

"But your mother?"

Pink shook his head decisively.

"Not at all. Mustn't get the old girl involved, you know. 'A house divided'—you know the old proverb. Going to earn my three full and hearty meals, not to mention beer and 'baccy and what-not—earn it myself—beholden to nobody, by Jove! Tell me whom I must marry!" He sat back and laughed. "Incredible! Three meals and all that, eh? Ever think of it?"

"Can't say I ever have—in the way you mean."

Pam smiled inwardly. Motherless, she'd been chatelaine of Gwasthkare Holdness since childhood, and knew every tenant and every tenant's need and want on an estate covering several thousand broad acres. But she knew, too, how this shift of Fortune's favors had discovered Pink naked to the wintry wind.

"You'll *have* to marry her, Pink."

"Blowed if I do!"

"Why not? Is she so—so very awful?"

"Got my mind set on a girl of my own picking. Can't get it off her. Wish I could." He looked away and frowned.

Pam studied him a moment, then, presenting the top of the Leghorn again, "Why?"

"Wouldn't have me," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Besides—" He juggled the ten shillings.

On the way back to town, Pam said, "Have you asked her, Pink?"

He slowed the motor.

"Asked who—what?"

"The girl to have you?"

"Oh, no! Where's the good?"

"Is she—is she—" Pam began, but thought better of her question and changed it. "Why don't you?"

"Can't now, old girl—ten bob—three meals—six meals, by cooky! Not to mention tea and—" He lost the thread of his ideas taking care in the traffic.

WHEN they got down at the hideous pile of blackened stone, incarnate of Romance and which, when she was in London, Pam called home, she said:

"Come to dinner. Perhaps father can do something."

"Thanks. Not to-night. On my own, you know."

"Is she worth it, Pink?"

"She?"

"The girl you're giving up so much for, I mean?"

"Oh, the girl!" He shrugged and looked away from her. "She's nothing to do with it, you see. It's the *girl* I'm giving up—six bally meals and all that. Fancy—six!" He laughed suddenly. "I say, Pam, old gal; it's frightfully good of you to listen to my silly doggerel, you know. By!" He held out his hand.

For the breath of a second her eyes showed anxiety. She knew very well that under Pink's nonsensical chatter was

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tragedy of a sort. And, too, that men took tragedy that way—men like Pink. She had brothers—had had three. Two had gone to annihilation against German machine guns with just such silly chatter on their bright young lips. It was a part of their code—to take nothing seriously—these men who had stood hip-deep in mud and blood and faced hell with a jest. There was a catch in her voice as she smiled with confidence, with understanding, and said:

"Report progress, Pinky. I dare say you'll be getting some ideas, you know. Life's a bit dull these days. I shall be interested."

He pressed her hand, smiled, raised his hat and left her as the door swung open.

Inside the dark hall—as beautiful as the outside of the house was hideous—Pam covered her eyes a short moment, then turned to the door again. The man opened it mechanically and she stepped out. She watched Pink's retreating figure till he turned the corner into Piccadilly; then she ran quickly down to the motor, jumped in and pressed the starter. She had no idea why she was doing what she was doing—she knew only that it was the right thing to do.

TEN minutes later she was seated before Lord Pinkstone's rotund figure, smiling up into his red, worried old face.

"Just the one person of all persons in creation I wanted most to see!" he was saying.

"Really?"

"Yes. My wife's on my back. I'm a criminal of sorts. My sons are the important people in this family, it seems. Do whatever they damned like, and I, their father, must hold my tongue like any confounded servant-girl, by the Lord! Eh? What do you think of that?"

Lady Pinkstone appeared at the door. Pam rose.

"Don't listen to him, my dear Pamela," she said, tears in her voice and on her cheeks. "He forgets quite entirely that I'm their mother." She took Pam's hand and drew her down to the divan, where she sat, looking lightnings at her lord.

The earl smiled grimly and pulled at his mustache.

"That's right!" he said. "You women stick together."

"Has he told you what he's done?" Lady Pinkstone asked Pam.

"No; but I've seen Arthur," she said, laughing quietly.

"Ah! I told you so!" Lady Pinkstone cried triumphantly.

"Did you really?" his lordship muttered.

"What did Arthur tell you, my dear?" Lady Pinkstone begged, the tears beginning to flow freely.

Pam gave them an expurgated account of her interview with Pink.

"There! I told you so!" Lady Pinkstone cried again.

"Don't be a fool, Augusta!" the earl said angrily. "Arthur's got a thousand friends who'll see him through." He turned to Pam. "My wife thinks the poor ass'll allow himself to starve in London. Come—I ask you!"

"How can one know *what* he may do, James?" Lady Pinkstone sobbed. "What would have become of Jimmy if I hadn't forced you to your senses? He says himself it would have gone hard——"

"Served him right if he had!"

"James!"

"No, no; I didn't mean that, Augusta," the earl protested. "But—well, there you are!"

"Is she so very dreadful—this—woman?" Pam asked.

"Woman?" the earl repeated.

"The—creature"—Pam couldn't withhold the epithet—"who's got him involved? Pink—I mean." She looked at the mother.

"James won't tell me anything about her," Lady Pinkstone said. "I don't care who she is—she *can't* be what he says she is." She turned to her husband. "I don't believe there *is* a woman, James."

Lord Pinkstone grunted.

"Yes; there is a—woman," Pam said, inspecting her hands as though they needed inspection.

"Ah!" the earl cried. "Ah! Ah! Ah! So I'm always wrong, am I? Don't know what I'm talking about, eh? Don't——"

"James!" Lady Pinkstone exclaimed. "He's just as worried as I, my dear," she whispered to Pam. Then, aloud, she said, "Do you know the—woman?"

"No," Pam shook her head. "But he told me there was a—girl."

The earl grunted again but held his tongue.

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"You see, my dear," Lady Pinkstone explained, her voice trembling a little, "it's just what happened when Jimmy got entangled with—with that Miss Rosamond Spicer. James clinched the affair by——"

"Oh, come, Augusta!" the earl protested.

"By just this sort of rowdy goings-on," Augusta finished, ignoring the interruption. "Oh, if we could find out something about this girl of Arthur's!"

"But if Lord Pinkstone knows?" Pam said.

"I don't," the earl mumbled.

"What?" Lady Pinkstone was on her feet. "James!"

"Well, if she's a decent woman, why didn't Arthur say so? No; she's a rotter, like——"

"James!"

"A bawd! One of those——"

"James, you must stop! Pamela sha'n't hear such words in this house!"

Pam turned a troubled face to Lady Pinkstone.

"Who—" she began, but finding her question too difficult, turned it. "Pink said you—I mean, Lord Pinkstone insisted upon his marrying some one——"

Lady Pinkstone smiled and drew the girl into her arms.

"You, my dear," she whispered.

"Oh!" Pam gasped, and drew away.

LORD PINKSTONE held out his left hand, palm open, and punched it viciously with the forefinger of his right.

"I'm not such an ass as my wife would have you believe," he said slowly. "I own that I should have been less hasty, but——"

"Tell us just what Arthur said to you, James. Never mind anything else," Lady Pinkstone commanded.

The earl pursed his lips.

"Why, simply this," he said: "I said to Arthur: 'Arthur, my boy, I want to have a talk with you. Come into the study when you've finished your breakfast.' And he said—well, I've forgotten what he said. Some beastly slang, probably. 'Right-o!' Something of the sort, or——"

"James!"

"Well, my dear, I'm trying to tell you, you know."

"Go on!"

"Well—now, where was I? Oh, yes. I said, 'Arthur, my boy'—as mild as you please, mind—'Arthur, my boy, your mother and I think it time you were thinking of marrying.' And I got *this* for my pains!" The earl's face reddened. "'I am, pater.' That's what he said. 'I am, pater.'"

"Well?" Lady Pinkstone said impatiently.

"I paid no attention, of course. I simply went right on as though he hadn't interrupted me. I said, 'And your mother and I have just the right girl in mind for you, my boy.'" The earl paused. "Then," he went on finally, "then, he sprung this—this *creature* on me. Now, I ask you!"

"What, exactly, did he say, Lord Pinkstone?" Pam asked.

"Yes, yes! What did he *say*, James?"

"My dear Augusta, if you'll be quiet a moment—only a moment! He said: 'Thanks, pater. I've already picked a wife for your humble and all that sort of rot, you see.' Talks like one of those fellows of the halls! 'You'll marry the girl I've in mind for you, my boy, or you'll find yourself in future,' I told him. 'Sorry, sir.'" Lord Pinkstone spread out his hands. "And that's every blessed word I could get out of him, by heaven!"

"Was that all—really all he said?" Pam asked, a little breathlessly.

"Well, not quite all. He insisted he'd marry any scurvy har——"

"James!"

"Said he'd choose his own wife, thank me, and be damned if he'd marry anybody else's choice."

"And you didn't tell him who you had in mind?" Pam gasped, reddening.

"Tell him who I had in mind? My dear child, I never got a chance to tell him who I had in mind. I merely said, 'Arthur, I don't know who this filthy creature you've got yourself entangled with is, but if you refuse to obey me as your brother did with that woman of the streets——'"

"James!"

"'I'll kick you out of my house with my own boot, by the Lord!'"

"What did Arthur say then?" Pam asked, smiling in spite of herself.

"Said? Oh, a lot of rubbish. I had no right to name the woman he *loved* and *respected* a 'filthy creature'—that she was too good for the best man alive, and that if she were the arch-Magdalen of London,

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he'd marry her if she'd have him—which she wouldn't—or something equally idiotic. As if one of those wretched pink-tighted creatures like Jimmy's got himself married to—sticking their padded legs in the face of every man who——"

"James!"

"I beg your pardon, Augusta. But the truth is I'm a bit upset with all this rowing and naggling, you know."

"He's gone off without any money, my dear," Lady Pinkstone said tearfully.

"Money, fiddlesticks!" the earl said. He turned to Pam. "Will you believe it, my dear? He took every penny he had in his pockets and threw them into the fire—Except a few shillings he said some fellow in a Bond Street shop had given him in change, do you see? 'That's mine,' he said; 'but the rest I got from you. So here goes!' Then he flopped his check-pad at my feet and went off refusing to take a penny from his own father! Said he'd earn his way or starve——"

Lady Pinkstone's sobs burst into a cry.

"Oh, Pamela, we *must* find him! And—that woman—perhaps she can be bought off. Do you think she might, my dear?"

The earl snorted.

"Of course she can be bought off! She's only after his money. Augusta, come, my dear; don't do that! I say, Pamela, can't you do something, for God's sake?"

Pam took the distressed mother's hand.

"I don't believe she can be bought off," she said, shaking her head at the earl. "Not if Pink cares for her really."

"Then Arthur *shall* marry her!" said Arthur's mother, and with her eyes dared Arthur's father to mortal combat.

Dinner announced, Pam couldn't see herself leaving these two worried old people to fight through the evening alone together. She despatched a note to Bobby to come and fetch her at ten if he were not engaged, then sat through an interminable meal, eating hardly anything but salted almonds and taking a sip or two of sherry.

AFTER missing his way something over a baker's dozen of times, Pink discovered Firkins' little house hidden away in a sort of cul-de-sac off the King's Road in Chelsea. He rang at the bell. The door was opened by a trim-looking girl who held a baby in her arms.

"I say, does your father live here, do you know?" Pink asked nervously.

"No, sir," the girl said, showing neither astonishment nor curiosity. "Pop lives over Hammersmith way, sir."

Pink held a card up to the dim light.

" 'Straordinary!" he muttered. "Hammersmith, you said?"

A tall, stoop-shouldered man in his shirt-sleeves appeared behind the girl.

"Who's the gentleman want, Annie?"

"Pop," the girl said, without moving.

"I say, Firks," Pink exclaimed; "you don't live Hammersmith way, do you?"

"Why, it's 'is lordship! Come in, sir. Move, Annie. Give Lord Arthur room to pass, can't you, girl?"

Annie moved, and Pink followed Firkins into a tiny room to the right of the tinier hallway, and sat down on the edge of a red-plush chair his host indicated.

"What about that narrative, Firks?" he said, tapping his chin with the crook of his stick.

The old waiter gave him a detailed account of a fortnight's search for work, ten bob in his pockets at the start and two left there on the fourteenth day, when he got work at the club.

"Thirty year ago, that was, sir. I dare say you couldn't do half that time on ten bob nowadays."

"Dare say," Pink agreed. Then he explained that his ten bob had already shrunk to one—he'd paid for Pam's tea and what-not with the other nine—and that he must earn his bed and board at once, beginning that very night.

Firkins, with the congenital pessimism of his class and age, pointed out the difficulties of job-getting with verbose minuteness. But when he'd reduced himself almost to tears, in the kindness of his heart he suggested his son as a possible source of information.

" 'E's the father of the little tike you seen as you come in, sir. Shall I arsk 'im, sir?"

"Hate to give trouble," Pink deprecated.

"Oh, it's no trouble, Lord Arthur, sir. No manner of trouble."

Young William was summoned, but could think of nothing immediate which he could honestly recommend as suitable to a lord's dignity—till his father had left the room, that is. Then he said in a hoarse whisper:

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"I heard you could use yer cuffs, sir. Saw a stick in the *Pink 'Un* 'bout your work in the army, sir."

"Cuffs?" Pink stared at his cuffs. "Use 'em?" Young William pantomimed expressively. "Oh, I see! Cuffs! Of course, of course, of course!"

"They're needin' a man that's handy with his knuckles down to Wally's in the Road. I was thinkin' you might earn more there in one night than you'd pick up in a month at any sort of labor, y' see, sir."

Pink stood up.

"Where's Wally's in the Road?"

"I'll show you, sir. But maybe you wouldn't care for it. A bit of rough goin' sometimes—bare hands, y'see, sir."

Pink put his hand in his pocket and brought out his lonely shilling. He spun it into the air and caught it deftly between thumb and forefinger.

"See that?"

"Yes, sir."

"If I didn't have that I should be absolutely shillingless, do you see?"

Young William didn't take "all this tosh," as he mentally called it, very seriously, but he saw the prospect of an interesting evening.

At Wally's in the Road, which it took them some time to reach, Pink was introduced to a burly brute who looked him over critically with the one good eye he possessed, then took him into a long, dingy room at the back of the private bar.

"Strip," he said laconically.

Pink stripped.

Twenty minutes later, as he stood alone on the Chelsea Embankment and contemplated the slow river, he muttered:

"Twenty quid for a knock-out, ten for a draw and a fiver guarantee. Saturdays, Sundays and bank holidays." He was quoting his potential earning-powers. "Three beastly meals every twenty-four hours, taking no sort of account of beer and tea and 'baccy and what-not. Incredible!"

He continued to stare at the river, and it came to him slowly that he'd read often enough of the men and women who were found floating there.

"Three beastly meals," he muttered again and again, like the refrain of a song, "or, barring that—*this!*"

He took out his shilling and looked at it.

"Good omen to-day's Saturday, by Jove!"

ABOUT eleven o'clock Bobby sauntered in, with apologies for his tardiness.

"Been delayed," he said. "Playing good Samaritan to an insane friend of Pam's." He swallowed several cubic yards of cigarette smoke, and when it had returned to perfume the air of the drawing-room, he looked into it as though for inspiration; then he said,

"Saw Arthur."

"Eh?" the earl exclaimed.

"Oh, Robert!" Lady Pinkstone begged. "Where? When? What is he going to do? He's coming home, surely? He didn't take his father's words——"

"My dear Augusta," the earl remonstrated, "do let us hear what Robert has to tell us."

Bobby turned his eyes on his sister.

"He's at Freddy Cortlish's flat in Knightsbridge. Met Freddy—I did. Seemed worried about Arthur. Said he'd been talking socialism to him at the club."

"Socialism?" Lord Pinkstone gasped.

"James!" Lady Pinkstone almost screamed. "Please let Robert get on."

Bobby examined his cigarette-holder with intense care.

"Seems he went to call on a chap—a waiter from the club—lives in Chelsea—Freddy's idea. Dunno where he got it—right, though. We went there. Seems waiter's son got Arthur to take on a bout at a place down in Putney. We went there. Got there just as match was on, you see? Arthur put his man out in tenth. Earned twenty pounds—so waiter's son said."

While Lady Pinkstone, with the inevitable delays of frantic haste, was got ready to fly to her "baby," the earl and Pam got the more intimate details from Bobby.

"Jolly knocked about, by George! But put up a ripping fight. Bare knuckles. You'll see. Put his man out in tenth, and then walked to the ropes and fainted in Freddy's arms. Raged like a wild beast when he woke up in Freddy's rooms. Said we were a pair of what-y'-may-call-its, you know." Bobby laughed. "Insisted I should go back to the beastly place and get his prize-money!"

"Did you?" the earl asked.

Bobby grinned.

"Supposed to be doing it now."

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Lord Pinkstone took two ten-pound notes from his pocketbook.

"Better give him those. He'll want to brag about earning it, I dare say. Very likely 'll have 'em framed and point 'em out to his grandchildren!"

Bobby laughed and looked at his sister.

"Dare say. Seems a—er—bit upset about some silly girl or other. Raved about her—delirious and all that, you know, till old Burneslie got there and gave him a quieter. Looks like a mummy in South Kensington, by George!"

At Freddy's flat in Knightsbridge they were met by Dr. Burneslie, who cautioned silence and, with his finger to his lips, tiptoed ahead of the procession—of three—Bobby and Freddy were not to follow—into the room adjoining that in which the lost sheep lay. He, the lost sheep, was, however, visible through the doorway, lying in bed, his hands incased in huge mitts composed of yards of snowy bandages, his face completely covered in the same veiling—save for a tiny aperture for breathing and his left eye. His head moved slowly from side to side, and through the bandage over his mouth a low sound issued. A white-capped nurse stood by the bed holding in her hand a hypodermic needle. Dr. Burneslie beckoned her.

"What's he saying, nurse? Can you make it out?"

A sob escaped Lady Pinkstone's heart, and she gripped her husband's hand. Nurse looked at Pam.

"No, Dr. Burneslie."

"See if you can get it," Dr. Burneslie said in a whisper to Pam, and at the same instant winked a slow eye at the countess.

Pam crossed quickly to the bedside, and Dr. Burneslie softly closed the door, shutting himself and the others outside. Lady Pinkstone made an exclamation of protest. Dr. Burneslie smiled and took out his watch.

"Fifteen seconds, and then we'll see."

He kept his eyes on the watch for the allotted space, then softly opened the door again.

On the way home in the motor, the earl sought his wife's hand. She smiled at him through her tears.

"You forgive me, James, for being so cross?" she whispered.

"My dear!" he said, and cleared his throat harshly.

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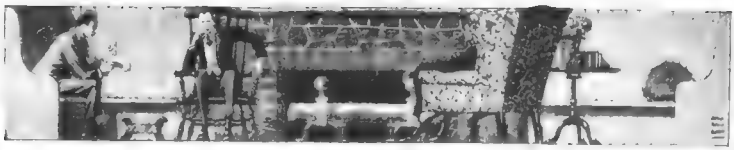

Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

RAFAEL SABATINI ("The Urbinian," page 2) confesses that the most thrilling adventure he has ever experienced was connected with salmon-fishing in the north of England.

I had already killed two salmon [he writes] and was wading deep in a pool when I hooked a third and very wild fish. In attempting to check his first rush I lost my footing and plunged over my head in the water. My anxiety to keep up the point of my rod, in order to maintain connection with my fish, kept me bobbing up and down as I swam until I realized that I had better think of myself. Thereupon I made a good recovery unaided, and on wading out I was relieved to find that my fish was still on. After a tough fight I brought it to the gaff—an eighteen-pounder.

THE real adventure came when Sabatini read in the London papers that he had had a narrow escape from drowning—so narrow that many of them published obituary notices.

Sabatini was born at Jesi, central Italy, in 1875, and was educated in Portugal and Switzerland. Like Conrad, the language in which Sabatini writes is not his mother tongue. Indeed, he never attended an English school, and his knowledge of the language up to the age of twenty was acquired in foreign schools, supplemented by a little practise with his mother, who was an Englishwoman. His best known books are "The Sea-Hawk," "Scaramouche" and "Captain Blood."

"The Urbinian" was published in book-form in war-time, but no book had a chance then, and only fifteen hundred copies were printed.

EVERYBODY'S, therefore, feels justified in republishing it in its pages, because it is a good story.

ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, whose "The Bucoleon Treasure" begins on page 45, has a pet aversion—blurbs.

You said in your letter, by the way, that if I didn't want to write about myself I could take a shot at one of my pet nuisances. Well, one of the dearest of those pets is the blurb in any form. I hasten to admit that I have fallen for it myself. I have both perpetrated and consumed it, and, therefore, by implication have tolerated it. But for several years now I have been contemplating revolt. It has required much mustering of courage. All the mustering is not done—or I wouldn't be writing this letter. But the time is rapidly approaching, I feel, when I shall sally out, snickersnee in hand, and slay a blurb. The natural question for you to shoot back at me is: "Will it be an A. D. H. S. blurb?" Ah! But I refuse to answer. It would tend to commit me and cramp my style. All that I shall insist upon at this writing is that I'm agin blurbs and do honestly contemplate blurbicide at the first conjunction of courage and opportunity.

HUGH WALPOLE ("The Picture Book," page 103) is the son of the Bishop of Edinburgh and was born in Auckland, New Zealand, in 1884.

After leaving Cambridge he did newspaper work in London, then began writing novels.

In early youth he spent three years in America, where his father was professor of Dogmatic Theology in Union Theological Seminary, New York. His first work was a novel about Guy Fawkes, written at the age of twelve and submitted to the critical eye of the family cook. His first published novel, "The Wooden Horse," saw the light while Mr. Walpole was a master in a provincial school outside of London. He showed it to a fellow master, who told him blandly he would never be a novelist. Then Walpole met Charles Marriott, a novelist of distinction, and he liked "The Wooden Horse." The result was that Walpole left the school and set out for London. He always begins

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Richard Connell is a new writer who is a real humorist. See the first story he has written for *Everybody's*—"Her Arabian Knight," page 134.

his novels on Christmas eve—he has always done so and believes that it brings him luck. He starts his work with his novel planned accurately in his mind, and no matter how far off Christmas may be, he adheres to his custom, and by the time he is ready to start, the novel is ready to unfold for him.

RICHARD CONNELL ("Her Arabian Knight," page 134) sends in blueprints and specifications as follows:

Name, Connell, Richard. Age, 29. Color, pink. Size, ample. Sex, yes. Present whereabouts, New York city. Educated, mildly. College, Harvard. Public offices held, Private, First Class, A. E. F. Marital state, yes—to an editress. Present work, the conception and scientific construction of brief prose, psycho-philosophic, ratiocinative and frequently humoristic microcosms—or, to be vulgar, writing short stories. After being urged for nearly twenty seconds, Mr. Connell consented to speak for publication. He said in part:

"Humor is the foe of bunk." (Applause.) "Humor is a flash of truth. People hate truth." (A voice: "Is that so?") "It cuts through the armor of bunk with which they protect themselves. I go so far as to say that humor—are there any reporters present?—is a more highly evolved and civilized art-form than what is called 'serious writing.' Also, it is harder to do well. Most literary (*sic*) critics prefer heavy, lugubrious stuff. Now, between you and me and the dear Prince of Wales"—here Mr. Connell lowered his voice confidentially—"I think critics are—pardon my French—a lot of—" Here the telephone-bell rang.

CHARLES GUERNON ("Pink," page 163) says he has known just such characters—delightful, clean-hearted people—as he portrays in this story, also some others not so lovable.

As for the others:

If there is any other hell than this terraqueous globe which we inhabit, I verily believe it is peopled with reformers—those confounded nosy people who would make the rest of us perfect by legislation—the "Thou shalt nots" of the world! Oh, I'm sure of it! And at that I don't drink, and never have. But if any meddlesome jackasses of either sex try to take my tobacco away from me, they are going to find that the male of the species is some scrapper, Mr. Kipling notwithstanding.

Like Dana Burnet, I have other occupations than story-writing. I can wash dishes like a breeze, cook like a general houseworker, and make a wood fire better than any other man living, not excepting the distinguished Dr. Henry Van Dyke. Brought up on the Atlantic Coast and with several generations of ship-builders and shipmasters back of me, I can't remember the time when I couldn't swim, row and sail a boat. And I love the sea as only those who have known it from childhood can.

Edison Marshall won the O. Henry first prize for 1921 with a short story that appeared in *Everybody's*. Another of his stirring tales of the North is published in this issue—"The Savage Breast," page 33.

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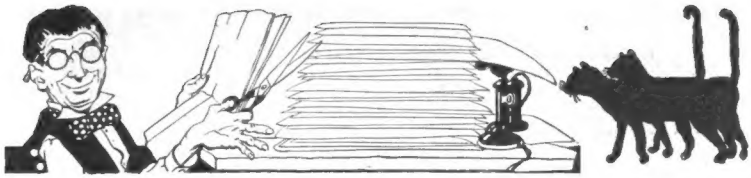

Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

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In La Blanche face-powder adv ¾ "*Send* 10c. *for a sample, free.*"
(MISS A. C. M.)

In Baton Rouge: "*A. Grouchy, Mgr., Istrouma Hotel.*"
In Hartford, Conn.: "*Nifty Clothes with Pep.*"
From school composition on "The House of the Seven Gables:" "*They had a rumor staying in one of the gables.*" Another one of those skeletons in the closet.
(MISS E. T.)
On Washington St., Brooklyn: "*Kick the Printer.*" (W. B. H.)
On Forty-first Street, New York: "*R. B. Gentle, Dentist.*" (W. B. H.)
Near Philadelphia: "*Rosemont Ice Co., B. Friese & Sons.*" (P. T.)
In New Orleans grocer's window: "*Come and see my tongue*—10 *cts.*"
(MRS. L. M.)
On Nostrand Ave., Brooklyn: "*I. Black, Hats.*" (J. E. D.)
In Providence, R. I.: "*Killguss & Mende.* Furniture Repaired."
(MISS E. A. L'B.)

(*On grocer's wagon in Texarkana, Tex.*)
CHATFIELD & STEEL
JOE CHATFIELD WILL STEEL
GROCERIES
(C. N. M'C.)

Well, how can *I* help it way off here?

(*On Twenty-third Street, New York*)
R. AND H. BLOOMER
MANUFACTURERS OF
ALL KINDS OF BLOOMERS
(W. J. N.)

Male and female create they them.

(*Circular of The Emerman Company, Erie, Pa.*)
BABY
Stock List
Prices Furnished Upon Inquiry
(J. J. M'L.)

Here's where *I* save money.

(*New York Tribune*)
LURED BY FAR NORTH, 3 BOYS FLEA TO BE MOUNTED POLICE. (C. E. M.)

And they'll have to scratch to catch 'em.

(*In Hoboken, N. J., Directory*)
Otto Schrink

Keeps just one lap ahead of his flannels.

(*Mason City, Iowa, Globe-Gazette*)
Mrs. W. J. Stork has returned from a week's visit in the Twin Cities with friends and relatives.
(REV. T. P. S.)

Wonder if it can be that Papa Stork is headed this way?

(*Local paper*)
Many Sing Sing convicts have taken to writing poetry.

Going from bad to verse.

(*Rhinebeck, N. Y. Gazette*)
Last Wednesday, Thursday and Friday the people developed in this part of the country a great desire to attend the auction down at Rhynder's store in Rhinebeck, and a fine time they had even if they were astonishingly sad that no more would they see among the eatables the smiling face of the proprietor and the daughter whom every one liked so well.
(W. T. A.)

Now I know why my lettuce was so gritty.

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(Philadelphia Bulletin)

Ford Sedan, 1921, starter and rims; shakes you up and shakes you down; $175 on delivery, balance monthly. 1532 Oxford Avenue. (E. V. W.)

Boy, call Diogenes on the 'phone, quick!

(Lipscomb, Tex., Limelight)

There was not a very large crowd at Sunday-school Sunday. There was no Christian Endeavor. Mr. Nelson was to be leader.

That's why I stayed away, too.

(Detroit News)

BASEBURNER: Pup, 3 months old, house-broken, $25. 11988 Waltham Blvd. (MRS. A. W. S.)

Grate bargain for some one.

(Los Angeles Times)

DIVORCE SUITS FILED

MORRIS. Jesus against Abraham. (C. B. O.)

For further particulars see Henry Ford's *Independent*.

(Sign on roadside near San Fernando Mission, Cal.)

Fat Milk-Fed Friars For Sale. (MRS. H. C.)

Why not runum under a steam-roller, then sellum for prayer-rugs?

(From a Malta newspaper)

The house was full to its utmost capacity, the elegant night-dresses and toilets of the ladies making a grand showing.

Disproving the old theory as to how to make a Maltese cross.

(London letter in Vanity Fair)

It has now spread to such an extent that the vast majority of well-dressed men wear nothing but a silk hat in the evenings. (F. T. S.)

What remarkable weather we're having!

(Hartford Courant)

As Mr. Strong's given notice to the milk company that he shall deliver no more milk after July 18th, the cows must be sold for the high dollar. This is a good herd of cows, as Mr. Strong has spared neither time or money in correcting them. C. B. JONES, Auctioneer. (MISS M. S. C.)

Must be regular Lady Chesterfields by this time.

(Hartford Times)

OVERHANGING LIMB CAUSES $500 SUIT.

As a boy, 'twas a projected limb that always spoiled my suit.

(New York Times)

REPUBLICAN WOMEN TO HEAR SENATORS AT LUNCHEON TO-DAY.

That's nothing; y' oughter listen to 'em at a regular soup-to-nuts dinner.

(Fairhope, Ala., Courier)

The membership fee was fixed at $10 for men and $5 for women, the payment of $10 by a man covering the membership of his wife also, if married. (MISS M. M. S.)

And then again——

(Ads. of Surprise Store, Hartford, Conn.)

MEN'S PANTS MUST GO!

My Gawd! Where can I find a barrel?

(Ads. in Hartford Courant)

Put a Hupmobile in her stocking. (R. E. Y.)

My Gawd! What a gazelle!

(Hartford Times)

Small shapes are being shown for the first of the season, but it is thought that by the time spring is really here the large shape will be much in demand.

Sure will, if it means an automobile thrust upon 'em.

(Chicago Tribune)

NEW LISBON, WIS.: While in a fit of despondency, Joseph Witoslouski killed himself by shooting. He placed the muzzle of the gun under his chair and blew off his head. (C. C. P.)

Proving the old adage that the longest way round is the surest way there.

(Mobile, Ala., Presbyterian News)

Rev. James W. Marshall was married December 14 to Mrs. Marion L. Stallworth in Tinela. The ceremony was performed by Rev. George F. Johnson, Dr. Dunbar H. Ogden serving as best man. It was the first time Mr. Marshall was married; it was the first time Mr. Johnson performed a ceremony; it was the first time Dr. Ogden was best man. (E. F. A.)

But Mrs. Stallworth was all smiles.

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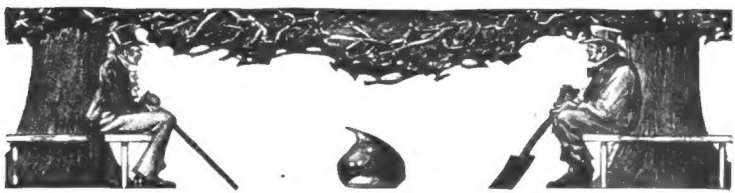

Everybody's Chestnut Tree

EDITOR'S NOTE: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.

A YANKEE soldier while in England was being shown over an old church beneath whose floor there were many graves.

"A great many people sleep within these walls," said the guide solemnly, as he indicated the inscription-covered floor.

"Is that so?" replied the Yankee. "Same way over in our country. Why don't you get a more interesting preacher?"

TWO women from a country district came to a small city to live. One day, as they were leaving a department store where they had made a number of purchases, the proprietor was standing at the door.

"Good-day," he said courteously. "I hope you will call again."

"Oh, thanks!" replied one of the women, not to be outdone in politeness. "And you must come and see us some time."

JACQUES had not been over from France very long and did not know the language very well; so when he wanted to know the meaning of a word he went to his friend Hodges. One day he came and asked,

"What is him a pole bear?"

"You mean a polar bear? That's an animal that's up in the north, lives on the ice and eats fish."

"I will not be heem! I will not be heem!" cried Jacques excitedly.

"My dear fellow," said Hodges, "no one wants you to be a polar bear."

"But yes, *monsieur*," answered Jacques; "a man next door he die, and ze neighbors say will I be pole bear. But live on ice and eat fish—nevaire!"

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL was once present at a gathering in Peoria, Illinois, where two ministers got into a lively argument as to whether immersion or sprinkling was the most efficacious method of baptism. In an unlucky moment the opinion of the famous agnostic was asked, and it may well be believed that he did not let so good an opportunity pass.

"Why," he said, "to tell the truth, I don't think either way is worth a tinker's dam without soap."

BEFORE our agrarian population had taken so enthusiastically to the automobile, two farmers drove into town in an old spring wagon pulled by a very bony nag. The little burg had just been incorporated, and among the evidences of this was a brand-new sign at the town line: "Speed-Limit, Ten Miles an Hour." Observing this, the driver began whipping up his steed vigorously.

"What's yo' hurry?" demanded his companion in mild astonishment.

"See that sign?" returned the other. "But I dunno if I can make it or not."

A WOMAN was instructing a new servant in her duties.

"Now I want you, Annie," she said, "to be especially careful in dusting these portraits, for they are all old masters."

Annie looked at them in respectful surprise.

"Just fancy, ma'am!" she said. "Who'd ever have thought you'd been married so many times?"

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A YOUNG minister, noted for his jollity, was dining at a farmhouse one Sunday, and when he received a plate heaped with roast chicken, remarked facetiously,

"Well, here's where that chicken enters the ministry."

"Hope it does better there than it did in lay work," rejoined the bright boy of the family.

THE little stern-wheel steamboat had just stopped at a small Ohio River town to put off freight, and among the deliveries were two burros.

The local wharfman, checking his freight manifest, appeared to be puzzled. He would look at the two burros, carefully scrutinize the manifest once more, and then glance quizzically over the pile of freight. At last one of the clerks on the boat, noticing his actions, called out,

"Doesn't everything check out right, Henry?"

"Well, not exactly—no," said Henry. "I am short two bureaus and over two jackasses."

A TEMPERANCE lecturer was violently denouncing the use of all intoxicants before an audience in a town where the majority appeared to favor the "wide-open shop." He was frequently interrupted by sarcastic remarks and finally a huge chunk of wood was thrown at him. Fortunately, however, the aim was bad and it fell on the platform. The lecturer picked it up and showed it to the audience.

"Good heavens," he exclaimed in mock anxiety, "some one present has lost his head!"

AN IMPORTANT person from a small town had his dress clothes made by a Fifth Avenue tailor while on a visit to New York. He wore them at a social gathering on his return home and complained to a friend of the way the metropolitan tailor had done the job.

"What's wrong with the clothes?" asked the friend.

"Too small," said the great man; "far too small."

"Well, John," said the other, grinning, "you should have remembered you're not such a big man in New York as you are up here."

LITTLE Nellie's mother was entertaining a famous aviator. After he had finished a thrilling story, little daughter sighed deeply and said,

"I've clear forgot how it feels to sail through the air."

"Why, Nellie," said her mother in a shocked voice, "you were never in the air in your life!"

"Gracious, mamma! Have you forgotten that the stork brought me?"

"YES," said the old man to his visitor; "I am proud of my girls and would like to see them comfortably married, and as I have made a little money, they will not go penniless to their husbands. There is Mary, twenty-five years old, and a really good girl. I shall give her one thousand dollars when she marries. Then comes Bet, who won't see thirty-five again. I shall give her three thousand dollars. And the man who takes Eliza, who is forty, will have five thousand dollars with her."

The young man reflected a moment and then asked,

"You haven't one about fifty, have you?"

IN A CERTAIN town south of the Mason and Dixon Line there lived a negro whose time was spent mainly in hanging round the sheriff's office. At every chance he would beg the sheriff to appoint him a deputy, and in self-recommendation would boast loudly of his courage and ability.

One day a notorious bad man from the back country drifted into town. Thinking to have a little fun with the negro, the sheriff informed him that at last he had concluded to grant his wish.

"And, Sam," he said, "Mose Allemeece is in town, and your first duty will be to go out and get him. Of course, Sam," he went on, "you know Mose is a bad man and mighty quick on the trigger. But if he happens to kill you, remember we will all be round on the street talking it over and saying what a brave deputy you were to go after him."

Sam's eyes opened wide. Finally, shaking his head, he backed away precipitately.

"Cap," he said, "I done concluded I don't crave that deputy job after all. That there kind of conversation you was talkin' about is just the kind I likes to take part in myself."

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